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# **Migration and foodways: continuity and change among Ghanaians in London**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
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## **PREFACE**

In the literature review I present an argument in support of research of West African food habits in the UK. Here, however, I must set out my personal motives and interests in conducting research into the Ghanaian community. In 1994, as part of my Master's thesis, I carried out a small-scale study into the food habits and food behaviour of Ghanaian students living in Germany, with an explorative two month visit to Ghana. My interest in African food and eating practices in Europe was fuelled by the apparent lack of information or literature on the topic. As a migrant myself, from Finland, and a student of nutrition, nutritional anthropology, and sociology, the study of migrant foodways was an area of research interest.

My informants in Germany were seven individuals, six of whom were males, and their status didn't allow me to study food and eating in the social context of households. Having experienced eating within Ghanaian homes in Ghana, I wanted to see how it was organised in diasporic Ghanaian households of different types. In particular, I was interested in the social organisation of eating.

Since I had moved to live and work in London, the metropolis provided the ideal setting for the research as the hub of Ghanaian life in the UK. I was already connected to the community through personal contacts, and during my first few years in London, prior to conducting actual research, managed to attend various social functions and shop in a few Ghanaian stores. What struck me then was the way in which many large functions were attended solely by Ghanaians. There was less mixing with the general population, unlike in Germany. On many occasions, I felt as if I were in Ghana. The idea of this PhD crystallized and it has sustained me intellectually and physically over the years.

## **ABSTRACT**

### Migration and foodways: continuity and change among Ghanaians in London

Helena Margaret TUOMAINEN

Keywords: migrants, food habits, meals, ethnic identity, gender, ethnic food  
businesses, Ghanaians, London

This qualitative study examines the relationship between migration, foodways, ethnic identities and gender through a case study of a West African community in the UK, Ghanaians in London. The study is grounded in qualitative and theoretical research on meals. The micro-level analysis of food habits within households is set in a wider context by exploring the development of the food culture in the community as a whole.

The main research questions are: 1) How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels? 2) What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups? 3) What is the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities?

At the household level, the focus is on the structure of food and eating in the past and present, and on food habits as symbolic expressions of ethnicities and gender. The study employs ethnographic methods of investigation in studying Ghanaian households, functions, restaurants and food stores.

The thesis highlights the role of substitutes in maintaining meal formats and the identity of the food despite changes in its nutritional content. Transformation of food habits occurs through improved access to formerly unavailable foods or meals, enabling migrants to express hybrid identities. Transformation also occurs in the second generation due to shifting identities and the acceptance of other food cultures. Functions can form an arena for the renewal of commensal relationships among migrants. At the community and household levels, the role of gender is important in the maintenance of foodways and ethnic identities. Among first generation migrants it is possible to observe a shift in emphasis from 'tribal', or 'regional', to 'national' food, and among the second generation, a further shift away from 'national' or 'continental' food to food with a more comprehensive reach. These shifts express symbolically changing identities and ideas of difference.

## INTRODUCTION

In the context of migration, the maintenance of previous eating habits helps migrants retain a significant aspect of their sense of ethnic identity. Cooked food or meals, as well as foodways in a broader sense, are products of culture and strongly linked with ethnic identities and gender differences. Ultimately, however, change in foodways is inevitable, despite the tendency for migrants to hold on to traditions. In this thesis I explore these issues through a case study of Ghanaians in London. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between migration, foodways, ethnic identities and gender, and the main research questions were:

1. How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels?
2. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups?
3. What is the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities?

The gendered analysis of food habits within Ghanaian households was set in a wider context by exploring the development of the food culture in the Ghanaian community as a whole. The focus as regards foodways at the micro-level was on the various spheres of the eating system (meal format, eating pattern, meal cycle, social organisation of eating and cooking). The broader study of food and eating in the community included the availability or distribution of ethnic food and food acquisition. At the household level, the structure of food and eating was analysed as an integral part of everyday life, but also contextualized historically, largely by analyzing memories related to food and eating prior to migration, and in the early years after migration.

In the literature review (chapter 1), the first section presents an overview of the literature pertaining to the subject of migration, food and identities, and draws attention to the lack of research concerning West Africans in the UK. It also clarifies the terminology used in relation to ethnic groups and identities. The second section focuses on research on the shaping of migrant foodways at both community and household levels and on the migration process. The third section reviews the literature on the various levels at which change in foodways can be observed, whether among migrants or in the general population. Chapter 2 provides a methodological account of the ethnographic research conducted in the Ghanaian community and introduces the setting and sample. Chapters 3 to 6 set out the main findings of the research, and chapter 7 discusses some of the main themes and conclusions of the study in relation to the research questions and addresses the original empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge of this thesis.



# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1. Setting the scene

Food is about identity creation and maintenance, whether that identity be national, ethnic, class or gender-based. (Sutton, 2001: 5)

### 1.1.1. Migration, food and identities

In our everyday life we constantly make decisions about not only what food to eat and how to prepare it, but also how to serve it and in what combinations and quantity; where, how and with whom to eat it. Our food habits are a symbolic expression of our sociality and along with language they are an emblem of our ethnic or cultural identity (Van den Berghe, 1984: 392). Food can be a signifier of belonging, or of demarcation and difference.

The way any given human group eats helps assert its diversity, hierarchy and organization, and at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently. (Fischler, 1988: 275)

We start learning the cultural rules of food and eating very early in our socialization, before we have a language, and are not even consciously aware of the rules until we are confronted with other cultures. As Abrahams states,

ethnic or regional identity can be acted out within the home by eating certain foods prepared in special ways. That this is an unconscious process, in the main, is clear, at least until the alternative foodways are introduced, at which point a choice is involved. (Abrahams, 1984: 20)

The terms 'foodways' and 'food habits' refer here to the behaviours and beliefs related to the production, distribution, acquisition, preparation and consumption of food at both the community and household levels (Counihan, 1999; Germov & Williams, 1999). Migration to a new country is a situation in which one is confronted with alternative or different foodways to those at home and in which active choice is implied. Migration to another culture is in many ways a challenge to individual identity. Yet, studies have shown that food habits are one of the last

cultural traits to change in the context of migration and ethnic minority cultures (Charon Cardona, 2004; Spiro, 1955). For example, it has been observed that certain characteristics of cuisines are preserved when the original language of the culture has already been forgotten (Calvo, 1982). According to Fischler, this is because “food and cuisine are a quite central component of the sense of collective belonging.” (Fischler, 1988: 280) Fischler argues that the symbolic value of food is central to our sense of identity, at both an individual and group level. The theory of “incorporation” explains the process:

To incorporate a food is, in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all or some of its properties: we become what we eat. Incorporation is a basis of our identity. (Fischler, 1988: 279)

Since incorporation is also the source of collective identity, it marks a distinction from ‘others’ (1988: 280). The variable classification of edible and inedible foods by different ethnic groups is a prime example of the way in which food demarcates cultural identities (Harris, 1987). The eater not only incorporates the properties of the food but, at the same time, “the absorption of a food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into the group which practices it, unless it irremediably excludes him.” (Fischler, 1988: 280-1) Culinary systems, according to Fischler, give, in part, meaning to man and the universe “by situating them in relation to each other in an overall continuity and contiguity.” (1988: 281)

Fischler develops the concept of ‘omnivore’s paradox’ first used by Paul Rozin. This refers to the need for humans to include diversity in their diets but simultaneously to be conservative in their eating habits, because any new food is a potential danger. The paradox lies in the “tension between the two poles of neophobia (prudence, fear of the unknown, resistance to change) and neophilia (the tendency to explore, the need for change, novelty, variety)”. (Fischler, 1988: 278) ‘Omnivore’s anxiety’, is directly linked with the process of ‘incorporation’, the

act which involves food crossing the barrier between the 'outside' world and the 'inside' world of the body (1988: 279).

Although the incorporation of unknown or unusual foods, as in the context of migration, implies risk, it also entails a chance and hope "of becoming more what one is, or what one would like to be." (Fischler, 1988: 281-2)

Food makes the eater: it is therefore natural that the eater should try to make himself by eating. ... *if we do not know what we eat, how can we know what we are?* (Fischler, 1988: 282) (emphasis in original)

In this context, Lévi-Strauss's notion that food must not only be good to eat, but also good to think is of significance (Lévi-Strauss, 1966b). Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle refers to the cultural transformation of nature (i.e. raw ingredients) through the process of cooking (Lévi-Strauss, 1966a), and as Harbottle (2000) notes, it is above all the cooked meal which carries symbolic meaning or power in terms of identity-formation. "Much of the value intrinsic to the meal lies in this cooking process and in the aesthetic and emotional activities of the cook." (Harbottle, 2000: 151) Rozin believes that flavour<sup>1</sup> is "most capable of evoking a particular ethnicity that is most crucial in providing a sensory and cultural label for the food of any group." (Rozin, 2000: 135). Flavour principles, i.e. continually recurring combinations of flavouring ingredients, "provide powerful and characteristic flavour profiles that are familiar and pleasing to those within the system, recognizable, and replicable to those from without." (2000: 135) According to Douglas, it is the patterning of a whole cycle of combinations that bestows on food an ethnically distinctive expression (Douglas, 1984b: 28). Scholliers maintains that

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<sup>1</sup> Flavour - "the deliberate modification of the taste of cooked food in addition to whatever flavour is provided by the foodstuffs themselves and the cooking techniques by which they are prepared" - is one of the key components of what Rozin calls "culinary systems or cuisines", the other two being the basic foods or ingredients and culinary techniques (Rozin, 2000: 134-5).

sentiments of belonging via food do not only include the act of classification and consumption, but also the preparation, the organisation, the taboos, the company, the location, the pleasure, the time, the language, the symbols, the representation, the form, the meaning and the art of eating and drinking. (Scholliers, 2001b: 7)

Also the places from which we obtain or buy food are of significance to our sense of identity:

particular parameters of identity such as family, class, ethnicity, and gender are reconstituted by shopping sites through the addition of particular distinctions which emerge from the experience of these spaces. (Miller et al., 1998: 19)

Harbottle (2000) draws attention to the fact that there is no simple relationship between, food, performance and processes of identity-construction. The relationship is complex, shifting and context dependent, like the notion of identity itself. Furthermore, as Harbottle argues,

the symbolic potency of food may itself be highly variable, such that food practices may be of relatively minor significance in relation to identity-formation within the ethnic majority. However, for minority groups ... for whom identity construction may be a more conscious and potentially a more problematic process, food consumption may be ascribed much greater symbolic weight. (Harbottle, 2000: 7)

In anthropological literature on migrant foodways, the maintenance of previous food habits and customs constitutes for migrants a significant aspect of their “construction and re-creation of their remembered and reconstituted” ethnic identity (Charon Cardona, 2004: 51). Furthermore, home cooking or ethnic food represents a symbolic and cultural connection with the homeland (Ferrero, 2002). According to Hage, nostalgic feelings triggered in the production and consumption of food are used in the process of home-building, not because migrants are constantly yearning for ‘back home’ at the expense of living their lives in the new host country, but so as to provide a better base for confronting life in their new environment: “to build a shelter from ‘social and cultural crisis’, but also to have a base from which to perceive and grasp ... opportunities.” (Hage, 1997: 108) In other words, “nostalgic feelings are sought as a mode of feeling at home where one is at present.” (1997: 104)

Sutton reminds us of the importance of the sensory “in reconnecting and remembering experiences and places one has left behind for short- or long-term migration.” (Sutton, 2001: 74) For example, the smell of food or foodstuffs can evoke memories on which identities are formed. Furthermore, just as people’s identities shift in changing contexts such as migration, objects or local products can shift identity when experienced in new environments, “becoming a symbol not just of home or local place, but of countries or perhaps regions.” (2001: 74) As an example, Feta cheese within Greece can have strong local associations. In the context of migration, however, it evokes a national ‘Greek’ identity. Although there are discourses related to local divergences in cooking, dress and custom in the country of origin, they become more intensified abroad,

where cooking is not simply an everyday practice, but an attempt to reconstruct and remember synesthetically, to return to that whole world of home, which is subjectively experienced both locally and nationally, if not at other levels as well. (Sutton, 2001: 86)

Caplan draws attention to the fact that very little social science research has been carried out in Britain in the past which directly considers the link between ethnic identities and food consumption (Caplan, 1997a). More research has been conducted in America (see e.g. Diner, 2001; Douglas, 1984a; Searles, 2002) and recently in Australia (Charon Cardona, 2004; Thomas, 2004). In the United Kingdom there is Harbottle’s study of the Iranian community in England (Harbottle, 1997a; Harbottle, 1997b; Harbottle, 1998; Harbottle, 2000) and a few other studies, such as the comparative study on South Asian, Italian and Irish communities in Glasgow (Bush et al., 1998; Williams et al., 1998) as well as Caplan’s own work on factors affecting food choice in two very diverse settings in Britain (Caplan et al., 1998; Keane, 1997)<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, in her edited book on “Food, health and identity” (Caplan, 1997b) there is further relevant research,

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<sup>2</sup> The studies by Bush and Williams et al. as well as Caplan et al. were conducted as part of the ESRC Research Programme “The Nation’s Diet” directed by Anne Murcott (Murcott, 1998).

such as Bradby's study among young Punjabi women in Glasgow (Bradby, 1997). A recent study by Kneafsey and Cox looks at how Irish people in Coventry use food to constitute their identity (Kneafsey & Cox, 2002).

Much of the research on migrant foodways in the UK has been carried out by nutritional scientists with the main focus on the nutritional quality of the diet and/or nutrition-related diseases (for a recent review see Landman & Cruickshank, 2001), although a few studies have been conducted with a broader remit (e.g. Wheeler & Tan, 1983). Studies have generally risen out of concern for the health and well-being of migrants or ethnic minority communities, focused on individuals, and collected quantitative data, and have described the modification of diet mainly according to food items and/or nutrients with a vague description of the meal pattern. People of similar broad geographical origins have frequently been grouped in one study. For example, since South Asians have been seen to represent a homogenous group of people sharing a common culture and foodways, there has been "a fundamental lack of information concerning the nutritional composition of cooked foods and eating habits of the different South Asian groups" (Kassam-Khamis et al., 2000: 186), hence, hampering effective dietary advice. A recent study showed that there is considerable variation in the traditional foods and dishes commonly consumed in the UK by South Asian Muslims from different geographical backgrounds (Kassam-Khamis et al., 2000).

As Holm (1996) states, the analysis of nutrition and dietary change immediately invites consideration of the broader social and cultural aspects of food. Dietary change is complex, involving questions of cultural, ethnic and personal identities.

Changing dietary habits are a part of a self reflection process, where the symbolic values of foods play an important role, together with the problems, dreams and ambitions of the immigrant. (Holm, 1996: S97)

Holm believes that attempts to promote healthier food habits among migrants and ethnic minority communities should not be based solely on studies of their

nutrition and health, but also be inspired by more qualitative studies of “food in the life of the immigrants”. (1996: S97) This is consistent with recommendations spelled out by other researchers who have been concerned about the superficial manner in which health scientists - particularly epidemiologists - have treated the social and cultural dimensions of migration (Friis et al., 1998; Janes & Pawson, 1986; Kasl & Berkman, 1983). Friis et al. believe that before any interventions can take place among migrants,

studies of previous eating patterns and how these are conserved or abandoned according to economy, accessibility, family size and structure, as well as educational background, psychological factors and employment status in the host country are certainly needed .... (Friis et al., 1998:178)

The argument for more qualitative research arises particularly in the context of foreign cuisines, since insufficient knowledge of the food culture under investigation may lead to unexpected difficulties in quantitative data collection, as experienced by Lockie and Dickerson, when trying to attain weighed food portions from Nigerian students in Aberdeen (Lockie & Dickerson, 1991)<sup>3</sup>. One of the problems with such an approach is that behaviour and social relationships are categorised according to the researchers' classifications and concerns and not according to those under investigation (Murcott, 1985). Indeed, quantitative assessment is extremely demanding and seldom efficient when dealing with an unfamiliar culture (Lentz, 1992). This is not to say that quantitative methods cannot be applied at a later stage, after the collection and analysis of substantial qualitative data (Pelto, 1984; Pelto et al., 1980; Pelto & Pelto, 1989).

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<sup>3</sup> This study is one of the very few which looks at food habits of West Africans in the UK. The difficulties the researchers experienced were partly due to Nigerians' hospitality: “Nigerians are extremely hospitable and offer food from their own plate to anyone who calls at mealtimes. In addition a Nigerian usually serves more food than he will eat and it was not possible to obtain accurate data for food consumed by visitors from the volunteer's plate or uneaten food. Household measures could not be used as the subjects were unaccustomed to using spoons or other cutlery for either serving or eating their food. Dietary histories could not be used as not enough was known about food habits and portion sizes of the group under investigation.” (Lockie & Dickerson, 1991: 266)

### **1.1.2. West Africans in the UK: reasons for more research**

A common observation among migrants from (rural) non-Western cultures to Western urban centres has been that within a generation there has been an increase in the incidence of a number of chronic diseases, particularly of 'lifestyle diseases' linked with dietary habits. In many instances 'traditional' food habits have been noticed to be healthier than those of the general population (den Hartog, 1995; Dowler & Calvert, 1995; Uniken Venema et al., 1995). Yet, research conducted into migrant and ethnic minority food habits in the UK has focused mainly on the largest ethnic minority groups in Britain, i.e. South Asians (Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & Lean, 1995; Bush et al., 1998; Kassam Khamis et al., 1996; Sevak et al., 2004; Williams et al., 1994; Williams et al., 1998; Wyke & Landman, 1997) and African-Caribbeans (Mennen et al., 2001; Sharma et al., 1996; Sharma et al., 2002; Sharma et al., 1999; Vyas et al., 2003), with very few studies carried out on any of the other ethnic minority groups<sup>4</sup> (Anderson et al., 2005; Bush et al., 1998; Carlson et al., 1982; Harbottle, 1997b; Wheeler & Tan, 1983; Williams et al., 1998). The paper by Lockie and Dickerson (1991) is one of the few published studies on West Africans in the UK, with little research carried out elsewhere in Europe (Gil et al., 2005).

Even though there are no official figures on the number of people of West African origin in the UK, there are indications that they are part of the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the country. While the 1991 census recorded considerably fewer Black Africans than Black Caribbeans in Britain (212,362 and 499,964, respectively), in 2001 the figures were 485,277 and 565,876, respectively, and according to recent estimates the balance may have tipped further since then. Four out of the past five quarterly Labour Force Surveys

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<sup>4</sup> The Diet and Nutrition Surveys and the National Food Surveys which form the basis of the food and nutritional surveillance of the national and regional populations in the UK have not assessed food and nutrient consumption or nutritional or health status in representative samples of minority ethnic groups or households (Landman & Cruickshank, 2001: 651).



estimated the Black African population to be equal or greater than the Black Caribbean population (Unknown author, 2004). The most recent survey put them ahead at 618 000. Among Black Africans, people of West African origin form the largest sub-population group in the UK, with Nigerians topping the list<sup>5</sup> (Daley, 1996). Considering the ever increasing number of West Africans in the country, and the rise in the so-called lifestyle diseases in this population group, it is of concern that not more research has been carried out among them.

The first population based survey examining the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors to include a large sub-sample of West African men and women showed that there was a high prevalence of obesity particularly in women of African descent, both from the Caribbean and from West Africa (Cappuccio et al., 1997). This may contribute to a higher prevalence of hypertension and diabetes. Another study has shown that not only is the prevalence of hypertension high among people of African descent, mortality from hypertension is also high: first generation migrants from Africa may experience a sevenfold excess over national rates, having the highest rates compared to other migrant and ethnic minority groups in the UK<sup>6</sup> (Raleigh et al., 1996). Mortality from stroke and other sequelae of people of African descent in the UK is also high. In 1989-92, the mortality ratios for cerebrovascular disease in the UK were the highest for West Africans (Wild & McKeigue, 1997), and this inequality was recognized by the UK government in its Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation" (Department of Health, 1998). Furthermore, data show that black people experience a marked excess of renal failure, in particular women, and especially in association with diabetes mellitus and hypertension (Raleigh, 1997).

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<sup>5</sup> The 1991 census indicated that the sizes of the Ghana-born and Nigeria-born populations were 32,672 (15,867 females, 16,805 males) and 47,085 (23,483 females, 23,602 males), respectively (Daley, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> In 1989-92, the standardised mortality ratios from hypertensive diseases in the UK (ICD codes 401-405) were 813 for West African men and 944 for West African women (Wild & McKeigue, 1997). However, these figures are based on small numbers.

As Cappuccio et al. state, although a different genetic make up might to a degree explain differences in cardiovascular risk factors between ethnic groups, “environmental and modifiable factors relating to diet and lifestyle play an important role.” (Cappuccio et al., 1997: 555) Although very little research has been carried out on West Africans in the UK or elsewhere, a few small-scale American studies involving Ghanaians conclude that cultural and lifestyle factors, such as diet and activity, may contribute more than ethnic predisposition to the prevalence and aetiology of diseases such as hypertension and diabetes (Banini et al., 2003; Osei & Schuster, 1996).

There appears to be sufficient evidence to justify research into the food habits of West Africans in the UK.

### **1.1.3. Clarifying terms: ethnic identities, groups and tribes**

The titles of recent books and articles highlight the interest in the relationship between food and identity (e.g. Caplan, 1997a; Harbottle, 1997a; Harbottle, 2000; Holm, 1996; Holm, 1997; Scholliers, 2001a; Searles, 2002; Tam, 1997; Valentine, 1999). Many of the authors discuss the variables that are central to our sense of identity and question the role of food in the process of identity formation and conservation. In this thesis the focus is primarily on *ethnic* identities and, as the first section highlights, previous food habits and customs are seen as pivotal for the maintenance of ethnic identities in the context of migration.

The term ethnic identity is used in this thesis as a general sense of the feeling of belonging to some ethnically defined group (Banks, 1996). Ethnicity can be understood as “a sense of group belonging, based on ideas of common origins, history, culture, experience and values.” (Castles & Miller, 1993: 27) While many sociological definitions of ethnicity emphasise a distinct culture and the idea of

the individual's self-identification with the culture and the ethnicity (Bradby, 1995), others put emphasis on a common ancestry, such as the definition by Bradby:

Ethnicity is defined as the real, or probable, or in some cases mythical, common origins of a people who may also have visions of a shared destiny (Brah, 1993) which are manifested in terms of the ideal or actual language, religion, work, diet or family patterns of those people. (Bradby, 1995: 406)

Bradby elucidates that the common origins may become mythologised when the "original establishment of a population is lost to the common memory or where a particular version is favoured by a culture." (1995: 411)

Ideas related to common origins, history and culture change only slowly, which gives ethnicity durability over generations, even centuries (Castles & Miller, 1993). Still, ethnic consciousness and culture within a group are not homogeneous or static. Ethnic identity is viewed here as the outcome of shifting positions, or a process (Werbner, 1990), not rigid or dependent upon a given 'culture'. Unlike in the past when ethnic boundaries<sup>7</sup> and cultural identities were commonly represented as fixed, the stress is laid upon fluidity and the importance of context (Gardner, 1995). In particular, migrants and their descendants do not have "a static, closed or homogeneous ethnic identity, but rather dynamic multiple identities, influenced by a variety of cultural, social and other factors." (Castles & Miller, 1993: 34) Successive generations continually reconstruct their ethnic cultures and identities (Tuchman & Levine, 1993: 383). According to Werbner, ethnicity as a process is situated in a primary sense in the domestic and inter-domestic domains which affect the social reproduction of a group over time (Werbner, 1990: 2).

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<sup>7</sup> Frederick Barth is usually referred to in the context of ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969). He argues that ethnic identities are formed at the boundaries where they meet other ethnic identities. Furthermore, the nature of the continuity of ethnic identities or groups depends on the maintenance of boundaries between groups. "The cultural features used as signals of these boundaries may change form and content, just as the personnel of the groups can change, without damaging boundary maintenance." (Kalcik, 1984: 45)

The fluid nature of ethnic identity and the importance of circumstances is emphasised by Nukunya, who provides an African perspective to the topic:

All over the world, people belong to different levels of groups: family, lineage, clan ward, village, town, tribe, nation, continent, race etc. etc. From early childhood, they are socialized to internalize the values of these groups and to identify with their interests and aspirations. The unit of identification or interest at a particular time, however, depends on circumstances. At one time a man is clansman, at another a tribesman, and yet another a Ghanaian, Togolese or Nigerian. People who belong to the same group at one level may find themselves in different ones at another level. ... Thus when the focus of attention is the town, people from different towns will consider themselves as citizens of their towns, but at another level when the need arises, they forget their affiliations and identification with it and count themselves members of either an ethnic group or nation. At a higher level still, persons from these latter units may even forget their nationalities when the continent or the race is the point of attention. Thus membership of each group changes with the situation. (Nukunya, 1992: 220)

In other words, ethnic identities are constructed on multiple levels and facets and have fluidity and hybridity depending on the setting and who you are defining yourself as.

Nukunya uses the term 'tribe' as a synonym for ethnic group, and defines it as a group of people who share the same language and cultural traits (1992: 222). 'Tribalism', on the other hand, implies not only tribal organisation or the interrelations between or within tribes, but also a "consciousness of being different as a group and an evaluation of other groups in terms of the standards of one's own group." (1992: 222) Tribalism manifests itself in attitudes and behaviour, such as treating one's own tribe and its members more favourably than others.

Concerning terminology, Nukunya explains that

though 'ethnic group', 'ethnicity' and 'ethnocentrism' are now in common use throughout the world, 'tribe' and 'tribalism' (especially the latter) have remained in currency not only in Ghana but throughout Africa. This is due mainly to the fact that the former are neologisms which gained currency only during the last few decades. As such, though ethnic group/tribe on the one hand and ethnicity/tribalism on the other are sometimes used interchangeably in Ghana and indeed Africa as a whole, the new words have not yet gained enough acceptability to replace the old. (Nukunya, 1992: 223)

Although the term 'tribe' does not capture the reality of physical mobility, overlapping networks and multiple group membership (Lentz & Nugent, 2000), I

will share Nukunya's stance, and use it in connection with Ghanaian ethnic groups, especially as it was also the term used by informants in this study.

According to Nukunya, common ancestry is not necessarily associated with tribes. Lentz and Nugent also note that in official discourse in Ghana the term is now used as "shorthand for groups speaking different languages and bearing different cultural traditions." (Lentz & Nugent, 2000: 10) However, the 1960 census of Ghana – the last to identify the ethnic composition of the country – produced a tribal map, with clear boundaries, which implied "univocal ethnic membership and a congruence of territory, language and culture" (Lentz & Nugent, 2000: 10), even though the boundaries of language, territory and descent hardly ever coincided.

Lentz and Nugent draw attention to the fact that the European concept of 'tribes' was adopted in Ghana in the past as the normative category associated with chiefdoms, which were created through colonial policy amongst formerly stateless societies. Under a policy of indirect rule, the British established a new political landscape, which often ran counter to existing networks, although the demarcated tribes were legitimated with reference to tradition and often with the active participation of local people<sup>8</sup>. The colonial rulers imposed a number of 'native states' which they imagined corresponded with established tribal boundaries (2000: 9). Lentz and Nugent believe that

the linkage of 'tribes' to the 'native states', with all the associated ambiguities has been the distinguishing feature of the ethnic experience in twentieth-century Ghana. (Lentz & Nugent, 2000: 10)

Bearing in mind the colonial influence on the ethnic identities of Ghanaians, or West Africans for that matter (Ikpe, 1994), in the next section I will review the

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<sup>8</sup> Lentz and Nugent (2000) contend that at least in some cases, colonial 'tribes' were the outcome of older 'we'-group processes. While colonialism may have altered some of the boundaries, it did not shape the world anew.

literature on the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on the culinary landscapes of the former colonies and on the migration patterns of people.

## **1.2. Migration and foodways: migrant food in the public and private spheres**

The migration of Ghanaians, like many other West Africans, to Britain has been strongly linked with the former colonial ties between the two countries. Well educated Ghanaians were accustomed to British institutions and customs in Ghana, and identities of Ghanaians have been formed through the colonial and post-colonial experience. Mennell et al. point out that the relevance of the processes of colonisation, de-colonisation and migration for the sociology of eating habits has barely been recognised (Mennell et al., 1992), although an interesting recent contribution is Diner's analysis of the impact of British colonial rule on the foodways of the Irish in Ireland and America (Diner, 2001).

In the first part of this section, I examine the impact of colonialism on the culinary landscapes, or foodscapes, of colonies and the migration patterns of people from the colonies to the 'mother countries' by focusing on the experiences West African countries had with the British. The section highlights the strong influence former colonial rulers had on the identities and tastebuds of colonised people, in particular the elite, many of whom were in the position to travel to the UK to study, and/or later on, to send their children there too.

The second part focuses on the characteristics of migration from former colonies and modern transnational communities. It also addresses the role of gender in the migration process.

In the third part, I review the literature in regard to the development of migrant or ethnic cuisines in the commercial and communal realm. I draw attention to the

significance of eating venues to the communities they serve and discuss factors influencing the establishment of ethnic restaurants.

The fourth part narrows down to the private or household level which is the main setting in which migrant or ethnic foodways are experienced by the majority of people. I then discuss literature on the adaptation or acculturation process and the factors affecting the change, maintenance and transformation of food habits.

### 1.2.1. The effect of colonization: two-way exchange of food and people

The colonial encounter eroded many borders between colonizers and colonized, and one of them was dietary. If the culinary exchange and experimentation ultimately enriched cuisines in both hemispheres, the initial prospect unsettled those Europeans who saw their own foodways as yet another measure (along with railroads and telegraphs) of their superiority as a civilization and race. (Freidberg, 2004: 37)

Without imperialism and colonialism, the foodscapes of former colonies would be very different from what they are today. In West Africa, although prior to colonialism a variety of significant new crops had been introduced<sup>9</sup>, new foodstuffs were brought in during the period of colonialism, many of them being processed foods. Industrial inventions in the nineteenth century, such as canning and, later, freezing, meant that it was possible to import familiar foods, for example, vegetables and dairy products from the homelands into the colonies to supply the white colonial elite (Mennell et al., 1992). Freidberg (2004) argues that the concern about the adequacy and hygiene of local diets was one reason why these foods appealed to the Europeans. On the other hand,

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<sup>9</sup> The European presence in West Africa had already brought about significant changes in the diets of the local people *prior* to colonial rule through the introduction of a variety of new crops from other parts of the world, such as maize (*Zea Mays*), cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), cocoyam (*Xanthosoma mafaffa*), plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*), groundnuts (*Phaseolus lunatus*), and pepper (*Capsicum annum*) (Abbiw, 1990). Other crops introduced to West Africa from other territories included sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), sweet oranges (*Citrus sinensis*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) and sweet banana (*Musa paradisiaca* var. *sapientum*). A cash crop of great significance to the region is cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*), a native of Central America, introduced at the end of the nineteenth century (Abbiw, 1990).

demand for such foods, in turn, reflected not only mere homesickness for familiar tastes, because the canned goods and adapted recipes did not necessarily even taste much like food at home. European colonials also bought these foods because they *helped to identify who they were and were not*. (Freidberg, 2004: 37; emphasis added)

Later on preserved foods became available to the wider public, although for the majority imported items remained an unaffordable luxury. In British West Africa imports included such items as beverages (ovaltine, tea and coffee), bread, powdered and condensed milk, sugar, butter, margarine and canned fish (Ikpe, 1994). In most instances, the impact of colonial rule on the food customs and food economies of the colonies was, nevertheless, far more significant than this. Goody and Goody mention, for example, the cultivation of European vegetables, the growth in the sale of cooked foods, and the introduction of Home Economics into schools (Goody & Goody, 1995). Ikpe describes the situation for Nigeria:

As far as food customs and food economy were concerned, these changes manifested themselves in the organization of food production, labour supply to agriculture, land tenure, transportation, commercialization and consumption. Colonial legislations, agricultural policies, western education, and novel economic and infrastructural developments all contributed tremendously to changes in the food economies and food cultures of Nigerian peoples. (Ikpe, 1994: 55)

In Ghana, despite the creation of artificial boundaries within the country, colonialism also played a role as a unifying force. The new political entities imposed by the colonial rulers came under one governmental umbrella with uniform laws and other common institutions which lessened tendencies towards inter-ethnic conflict. This, in turn, as Nukunya states, “greatly increased trade among the various regions of the country, enhanced inter-tribal interaction and laid the foundations for national integration.” (Nukunya, 1992: 117) Of significance was also the fact that English was introduced as the official national language becoming the *lingua franca*.

Further important consequences of colonialism were the support it gave to Christianity, formal classroom education and a money-using economy (Nukunya, 1992). The former two went hand in hand already earlier, but with the



formalisation of colonial rule, the relationship became even closer. Through the increase in government involvement in educational planning, the educational system became more uniform. On the other hand, the emphasis on literacy and the foreign content of education contributed to alienation from the traditional environment and culture. For people living in rural areas, sending children to schools was seen as a way to improve economic and social status, because many school leavers migrated to towns where new lucrative white-collar jobs were opening up. This education system weakened the traditional authority structure and kin group solidarity, and undermined indigenous culture and lifestyle, including food habits.

Formal education also forced people to take on European lifestyles. In dress, food habits, music, dance, entertainment and many other aspects of social life it became a fashion for school leavers to follow the Europeans. (Nukunya, 1992: 140)

The situation was very similar to that in Nigeria, as described here by Ikpe:

The Nigerian elites, who desired to be accepted into the privileged social and ruling group copied European customs and values as much as possible. ... Having been thoroughly influenced by the missionaries through mission schools, some of the Nigerian elites were convinced of the inferiority of their food customs and nutritional habits, and therefore copied the European food culture and entertainment patterns as sign of civilization. (Ikpe, 1994: 85)

This way of thinking permeated the society as others aspired to copy the habits of the European and Nigerian elites. Even the unskilled workers found some aspects of European food culture which they could integrate into their diet as a sign of progress (Ikpe, 1994: 87).

Goody argues that the emulation of the habits of Europeans in the wake of colonialism was partly due to the lack of *haute cuisine* in Africa, i.e. the near non-

existence of alternative or differentiated recipes, either for feasts or for class <sup>10</sup>  
(Goody, 1982).

Because African cooking was barely stratified in a hierarchical sense, there was little for newly mobile men and women to imitate. ... What has been taken up by the middle classes has been mainly foods of the European colonial powers. The latter not only kept their kitchens and modes of cooking but trained cooks to follow their particular ways and established rest houses, hotels, as well as a few restaurants that catered for their tastes, much like the Romans did in Britain. (Goody & Goody, 1995: 6-7)

Goody emphasises that in Ghana adaptation on the culinary front was more marked in the urban areas of the south where governmental employees, military officers and businessmen became accustomed to including tinned milk, tea, sugar, and breakfast cereals in their regular diet (Goody, 1982: 181). He maintains that many of these foodstuffs were seen as necessities for children, which partly reflected the investment in the next generation as “an effort to maintain and advance the standards of attainment that is characteristic of a group whose status depends upon its educational achievements” (1982: 181).

The copying of European habits was not limited to food items. Members of elite families started eating together at the same table as a sign of “civilisation, love and harmony” (Ikpe, 1994: 85), instead of the traditional way, in which men ate separately from the rest of the family. The elites adopted the use of cutlery easily, even when the greater part of the population continued to use their fingers. Furthermore, the wives of the educated elite took courses in English housekeeping, cookery, table manners, and entertainment protocols. At Christmas – which through “international standardisation of time, especially of festival time” was becoming a ‘holiday’ for “Christian, Muslim and pagan alike” (Goody, 1982: 181) – the dinner menu featured turkeys, mince pies and puddings

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<sup>10</sup> The lack of differentiation of African cuisine until very recently is one of the (or *the*) major themes of Goody's book, “Cooking, cuisine and class” (Goody, 1982). Goody delves into the complexities of food production and consumption, not only in West Africa but also in Europe and Asia. One of Goody's key questions deals with the reasons why the two African societies he studied in detail have undifferentiated cuisine, while societies of the latter two continents, such as China, India and France, have hierarchical cuisines.

(Ikpe, 1994: 86). Similarly, pastries and iced cakes became regular items at birthday parties arranged for children of the upper middle class (Goody, 1982: 181). Despite new habits, Jack and Esther Goody contend that

it is not the case that most Africans have abandoned their native cuisine any more than they have their native languages. But many of the new elite have become thoroughly bilingual . . . . (Goody & Goody, 1995: 8)

The term hybridity has been used to denote the development of “new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.” (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 118) Hall writes about the evolution of “cultures of hybridity” which he links closely with the “new diasporas” created by the colonial experience and the subsequent postcolonial migrations (Hall, 1992: 310-14). Hutnyk refers to hybridity as “a process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or ‘hybrid identities’.” (Hutnyk, 2005: 81) So, one can say that the impact of the British on Ghanaians and other West Africans was far reaching, changing food habits being only one expression of *hybrid* identities.

Colonisation also fuelled the desire in the colonies to travel and explore the source of the colonisers’ power. It offered the prospect of employment as seamen to many Africans from coastal communities, particularly from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and British Somaliland (Daley, 1996). They settled in the docklands of Cardiff, Liverpool, London and other ports. Yet the African population in Britain remained small; before the 1950s it was less than 10,000. A good proportion of these were students, as English education was held in great esteem by Africans. Many of the students were sons of chiefs, or were sponsored by missionaries or traders of African companies (Daley, 1996). In Ghana<sup>11</sup>, migration for education intensified in the decade prior to independence and in the

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<sup>11</sup> Facilities for university education in Ghana were not available until 1948 with the establishment of the University of Ghana, the first academic degrees being awarded in 1961 (Cobbinah, 1990).

post-independence period of the 1960s<sup>12</sup> (Daley, 1996: 45). Returning home, the Western-educated Ghanaians were assured high-status positions in the civil service and the professions. These 'Been Tos' ('someone who has been to England') also returned to high expectations, as they were expected to come back with wealth and abundant gifts (Graham, 1998).

The colonial empires gradually collapsed during the 1950s and 1960s, but this did not bring to an end the process of migration of people or the two-way exchange of foods from the formerly colonised to the former colonising countries and vice-versa. Instead, new waves of migrants came to their 'mother countries' bringing their food and cuisines with them. Britain and France now have substantial minorities of diasporic ex-colonial peoples.

In Britain, in the first instance West Indians were recruited to work primarily in public transport, the NHS and industries owing to the labour shortages (Rex & Tomlinson, 1979; Taylor, 1993). From the early 1950s, the previously small community of settlers from the Indian sub-continent began to grow as rural workers from India and Pakistan came to work in Britain, again with official support. A further group of colonial migrants were the Hong Kong Chinese, whose numbers increased significantly as they shifted their attention from the laundry trade to catering (Watson, 1975; Watson, 1977).

West Africans did not play a large part in the labour migration at this stage. Craven showed that the 1961 census was of limited use for estimating the exact number of West Africans in London, but named the twenty-four boroughs which listed West Africans by nationality (14 boroughs listed Ghanaians) (Craven, 1968: 1-2). At the time, West Africans were scattered throughout London and did not

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<sup>12</sup> Ghana gained independence in 1957.

form specific localized communities. Like earlier migrants, the majority were current or former students.

As indicated already above, the number of West Africans in the UK has increased significantly over the past decade. Both the Ghanaian and Nigerian communities are well established and both are diverse as regards employment, identity and education (Elam et al., 2000).

### **1.2.2. Migration process: the role of gender and transnational communities**

Castles and Miller (1993) recognise that each migratory movement has its specific historical patterns, yet believe that their four-stage model of the *migratory process* fits the migrations from former colonies to the colonial powers fairly well, but is less appropriate regarding forced migration of refugees or temporary migrations of highly-skilled personnel.

Stage 1: temporary labour migration of young workers, remittance of earnings and continued orientation to the homeland;

Stage 2: prolonging of stay and the development of social networks based on kinship or common area of origin and the need for mutual help in the new environment;

Stage 3: family reunion, growing consciousness of long-term settlement, increasing orientation towards the receiving country, and emergence of ethnic communities with their own institutions (associations, shops, cafes, agencies, professions);

Stage 4: permanent settlement which, depending on the policies of the government and the behaviour of the population of the receiving country, leads either to secure legal status and eventual citizenship, or to political exclusion, socioeconomic marginalisation and the formation of permanent ethnic minorities. (Castles & Miller, 1993: 25)

The end of the first stage is characterised by a proportion of 'primary migrants' returning home, but others prolonging their stay, or returning and then remigrating. The continued stay may be due to relative success or failure; in the latter case the explanation may be the lack of funds to achieve the aims they have for their return. As time passes, spouses are sent for and children are born,

and so an erstwhile temporary arrangement takes on a more permanent character (Castles & Miller, 1993).

In migration literature, women have usually been portrayed as dependents joining their husbands, rather than as autonomous actors (DeLaet, 1999). A large number of studies have focused on the migration patterns and experiences of male labourers. Indeed, women have been largely invisible in studies of international migration (Lee et al., 2002). Kofman et al. draw attention to the fact that although women and gender relations have been absent from major models that allege to explain the development of international migration in Europe, women were present almost from the beginning of post-war migration both as primary migrants and working alongside male partners (Kofman et al., 2000: 44). There is evidence that a large proportion of African-Caribbean women in the UK (77.3%) are engaged in some form of full-time employment and that the figure has remained fairly consistent since statistical data collection on their employment figures was introduced in the post-war years (Reynolds, 2001). Lee's et al. study among Chinese migrant women in Britain highlights the *diverse* experiences women may have within the same society at any point in time, and that "women are not usually just passive recipients and non-participants in the determination of gender relations, and clearly not all women are subjugated in the same way or to the same extent" (Lee et al., 2002: 616-617). Gardner argues that without the caring work of Bengali women in Sylhet and London, the history of male migration to Britain and subsequent family reunification there might be quite different (Gardner, 2002). According to Banks, the role of women in the development of ethnic identities of migrant communities has been recognised – "especially in (re)constituting households and providing a locus for cultural as well as biological reproduction" (Banks, 1996: 102) – but the role of gender in constructing and transforming ethnic identities is still an ill-researched topic. A

recent article on the topic shows how Irish women in Coventry were key actors in constructing an often ambiguous sense of Irishness in Britain through their involvement in food purchase and preparation (Kneafsey & Cox, 2002). Kneafsey and Cox (2002) also highlight the various family and friendship networks that exchanged food between Britain, Ireland and the USA.

In contemporary migration studies, numerous researchers use the notion of 'transnationalism' when they refer to various kinds of global or cross-border connections (Vertovec, 2001; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999). Migrant groups are seen to form transnational communities, which according to Portes, comprise

dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both. (Portes, 1997: 812)

Gardner contends that viewing migrants as part of two worlds which are dynamically intertwined is essential for a fuller understanding of them, whether they are based in the sending or receiving country (Gardner, 1995). Gardner carried out fieldwork in both locations, in a Sylheti village called 'Talukpur' and among the Sylheti community in London, renowned for its engagement in the catering trade (Gardner, 2002). She argues that migrants do not move between two bounded and separate worlds, but instead, home (*desh*) and abroad, or the foreign country (*bidesh*), are different locations of the same society, "the polar ends of a continuum which organizes so much more than simply spatial location" (Gardner, 1995: 8).

Gardner suggests that migration involves a process of regenerating oneself, and one's community. The process is creative, since migrants travel into "a realm where what has been left behind, and future destinations, are continually reimagined, the subjects of fantasy" (1995: 8). Increasingly, migrants can be seen

to inhabit a world where lives are no longer conventionally bounded or determined by space, and such ordinary categories as the household, the village, or 'community' are exploded as people move around the world. Gardner sees the development of a new community of world travellers that utilises both local and global symbols in creating identities.

In Talukpur, *bidesh* is envisioned as

the source of all advancement, a life-force, which if only people could gain access to it, would transform their lives. Accordingly, non-migrants perceive migration as the prime source of economic advancement, and the symbols of *bidesh* are given great value: the electronic goods, Western cosmetics, foreign-bought clothes, and so on. (Gardner, 1995: 273)

While people in Sylhet appear to value *bidesh* (abroad) for its economical potential, the local discourses of *bidesh* do not necessarily involve the cultural glorification of the West. The power of westernisation is countered by forces moving in the opposite direction. One example is the continuing stress of the *desh* (home country) as the "place of nurturance and spirituality" (1995: 274).

As highly valued Western goods move into Talukpur – the ghetto-blasters, TVs, and Western-style suits which returning migrants carry through Sylhet airport – goods from home, which contain the essence of the *desh*, are sent to the West. (Gardner, 1995: 274)

One of most common gifts sent to *bidesh* are foods produced by women which contain the essence of the *desh* and "symbolize the membership of the patrilineage by those who consume them." (1995: 125) The foodstuffs originate from local land and are prepared within the household. Parcels containing, for example, pickles, betel nuts and dried mangoes are sent to kin in Britain with neighbours or relatives returning after a visit to the village (see also Kneafsey & Cox, 2002; Sutton, 2001).

Hence, cultural flows are not one-way. Furthermore, *desh* and *bidesh* are increasingly interchangeable:



As families move to Britain, and mosques are built, *bidesh* is transformed into the *desh*. ... To call Sylhetis who travel and live across the world 'global migrants' then, is not to suggest that they are rootless. Instead, Sylhetis and their culture are no longer tied to just one geographical location. As their communities are recreated globally, they bring the *desh* to *bidesh*. Likewise, the influence of *bidesh* is returned to the *desh*, in the form of goods, remittances and ideas. In this process neither *desh* nor *bidesh* is static. Instead as over the years they are increasingly linked, both are transformed. (Gardner, 1995: 281)

In regard to the settlement and development of migrant or ethnic minority groups in Britain, most research attention in the past has been on South Asians (e.g. Gardner, 2002; Rex & Tomlinson, 1979; Werbner, 1990) and on West Indians (e.g. Cross & Entzinger, 1988; Hennessy, 1988; Ratcliffe, 1988; e.g. Rex & Tomlinson, 1979; Reynolds, 2001; Taylor, 1993), with relatively little research carried out on people of West African origin (Craven, 1968; Goody & Groothues, 1979; Goody & Groothues, 1977; Stapleton, 1978a). Recent studies include those by Elam et al. (2000), Henry and Mohan (2003), and Dudrah (2004).

### **1.2.3. Food and catering trade in migrant and ethnic minority communities**

As depicted by Castles and Miller (1993), the establishment of grocery shops and restaurants together with other 'ethnic' institutions is a natural development in the migration process, and reflecting on Gardner's work, an important step in regenerating the migrant community (see also Diner, 2001; see also Hage, 1997). In the words of Ghassan Hage, food provides "the basis for practices of home-building in the public sphere, in particular in fostering intimations of homely communality." (Hage, 1997: 111) For example, in Canberra, Australia, Vietnamese people travel frequently to Sidney<sup>13</sup> for weekends to "have a taste of Vietnam" (Thomas, 2004: 61). In the USA, Cuban eating locales established in the country since the 1960s have become important means of both cultural identification and an enactment of the past for the large Cuban population

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<sup>13</sup> A neighbourhood in Western Sydney was one of the main areas where Vietnamese settled when they first started arriving in Australia in the late 1970s (Thomas, 2004).

(Charon Cardona, 2004). In areas of Los Angeles mostly characterised as Mexican-American and Mexican, Mexican restaurants are reminders of social and communal solidarities within the community of Mexicans (Ferrero, 2002: 199). Likewise, thanks to the flourishing catering trade, Hong Kong Chinese in the diaspora are able to continue eating *yumcha* in a similar fashion as they would back home:

Going to *yumcha* Hong Kong style in a foreign country is like going to a church meeting or returning to one's natal home for a family gathering. Uncle Mak, an elderly man who emigrated to Vancouver with his son's nuclear family, religiously went to *yumcha* every Sunday at Maxim's Restaurant in a shopping mall called Tsimshatsui East (the name of a shopping district in Hong Kong in the middle of Richmond). There he was greeted by Cantonese-speaking waiters, and was able to order his favourite tea just as he used to in Hong Kong. This repertoire of *dimsum* enjoyed by Uncle Mak is the same that other Hong Kong immigrants find in Chinese restaurants in Toronto, Sydney, Brisbane, London, San Francisco and various other cities where the Hong Kong diaspora has mainly spread. Together with a Hong Kong based popular culture involving video-taped TV serial melodrama and swords epic fiction, Canto-pop CDs and concerts, and lately satellite transmitted TV news, *yumcha* contributes to the construction of a neo-Cantonese culture across the surface of the globe. The consumption and subjectivisation of these materials have created a new collective, the transnational *heunggongyan* [Hong kong] community. (Tam, 1997: 300)

### ***Historical perspective on migrant and ethnic minority food businesses***

In the UK, the flourishing 'Indian' restaurant trade has contributed to the mass production of ethnic food ingredients, which are now widely available and reasonably priced, thus enabling South Asians to create and maintain their own food culture (Jamal, 1996: 25). Yet, this was not always the case. Panayi (2002) describes how in provincial towns like Leicester in the early post-War decades the smaller numbers of South Asians meant that Indians and Pakistanis had great difficulty in getting hold of familiar fruit and vegetables.

The early immigrants obtained their ethnic food from wherever they could, whether the suppliers consisted of Asian or English shops in Leicester or retailers further afield. (Panayi, 2002: 49)

Similarly, older generation Cubans in Sydney needed to invest a considerable amount of time, money and imagination in the early years to obtain familiar products, some even resorting to growing plants themselves, including lime trees and sugar cane (Charon Cardona, 2004). In comparison, the situation in the

present-day multicultural metropolis is quite different, because Cubans are able to rely on the specialist shops catering for numerically larger ethnic groups despite not having any stores of their own. The diverse ethnic food market has enabled Cubans to reconstruct their cuisine and maintain the flavour of their Cuban dishes in their everyday lives, and, in turn, their sense of Cuban identity (Charon Cardona, 2004: 50).

Although there is no adequate historical source on the growth of restaurants serving foreign cuisine in Britain<sup>14</sup> (see Warde & Martens, 2000), there is evidence that both Chinese and Indians opened up eating places very early on in the migration process, when the migrant communities were still quite small.

As the nineteenth century dawned, the only eating establishments offering Indian cuisine were community meeting places for those who had jumped ship in London looking for a new life or, more often, been put ashore without any means of support. Some of these were *Vandary* (Indian chefs) who jumped ship to seek work in London's growing restaurant community but not enough to provide any real impetus for the cuisine. (Grove & Grove, 2004)

Similarly, the first Chinese eating places, small noodle shops and cheap diners, were set up in the dock areas of Liverpool and London to serve the Chinese seafarers (Chan, 2002). These 'chop suey restaurants'<sup>15</sup> were established as early as 1908, and by 1913 there were thirty shops and cafes for Chinese people in Pennyfield and Limehouse Causeway (Grove & Grove, 2004).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indian restaurants catered for the increasing number of Indian students, business men and officials living in the metropolis (Basu, 2002). The first recorded Indian restaurant of the twentieth century was opened in 1911

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<sup>14</sup> The publication of Kershen's edited book with chapters referring to the development of Indian and Chinese restaurants in Britain has slightly improved the situation (Basu, 2002; Chan, 2002; Kershen, 2002a). Furthermore, the Internet provides a new, albeit possibly less reliable, source of information on the development of ethnic restaurants in Britain. For an interesting account see "The history of the 'ethnic' restaurant in Britain" by Peter and Colleen Grove, published at <http://www.menumagazine.co.uk/book/restauranthistory.html>. Accessed 06.11.2004.

<sup>15</sup> The Chinese restaurants were named after the 'chop suey houses' established by their American counterparts (Chan, 2002).

but the first to have any real influence did not open its doors until 1920 (Grove & Grove, 2004).

Coming from North India they [the owners] opened their cafe in London's Gerard Street (now the centre of London's Chinatown) and employed four or five ex seamen. It soon became a kind of community and Indian Student Centre. Indian students in the UK rose from 100 in 1880 to 1800 by 1931. (Grove & Grove, 2004)

Noticeably, it was *men* who established eating places and dealt with the cooking and serving of food to fellow country men both in the Chinese and Indian communities.

When the new surge of South Asians arrived in the 1950s, it did not take long for the development of an ethnic food economy in the various towns in the Midlands and north of England which incorporated Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims from India, Pakistan and East Africa (Kershen, 2002b; Panayi, 2002).

For many migrant groups, the establishment of eating places for fellow community members has been the beginning of a process of setting up restaurants that have also catered for the culinary curiosity of the wider society. As Ram et al. state,

catering represents one of the classic 'niches' traditionally occupied by ethnic minority enterprise and is clearly an area where cultural identity is of the utmost operational importance, with caterers offering their own unique national-regional foods to a wider public .... (Ram et al., 2000: 498)

Those which have succeeded have in their part contributed to the acculturation, or modification, of food consumption patterns of the mainstream population (Jamal, 1996). As Jamal argues, the rise in ethnic food consumption among the majority in Britain is partly due to the exposure to various ethnic groups and their business activities, of which ethnic restaurants, ethnic supermarkets and ethnic grocery stores are prime examples (Jamal, 1996: 12).

*Factors affecting the establishment of migrant and ethnic minority restaurants*

The restaurant trade is a very public facet of food culture in the migration process, but not all groups are equally represented in the business. Considering the migration patterns to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s, it is interesting to note that the Chinese, the smallest of the major colonial/post-colonial migrant groups, has had the greatest impact on the culinary landscape of Britain. Chinese restaurants are distributed throughout the country, often in isolated pockets where there is no other ethnic minority presence<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand the Caribbeans, who were in the first instance the largest group of colonial migrants, have had the least impact. Recent market research shows that Caribbean restaurants or take-aways are highly localised and that awareness of the outlets tends to be very low among the wider population (Mintel International Group Limited, 2002). Similarly to the Caribbeans, (West) African restaurants have remained a curiosity, despite the greatly increased number of migrants from this part of the globe. This appears to be the case worldwide:

Just contemplate the fate of the African cookery as against that of India, China, Japan or the Near East. Despite the number of African immigrants to the Americas or more recently to Europe, there is little call for African restaurants in the same way as there is for those from Asia: they remain a curiosity. (Goody & Goody, 1995: 8)

A recent article in the Economist states that neighbourhoods with a higher concentration of Africans are characterised “not so much by ethnic grocers and restaurants as by long-distance telephone centres and internet cafes.” (Unknown author, 2004)

The so far limited academic interest in migrant or ethnic restaurants has focused on business entry among the different ethnic groups – i.e. why some have successfully entered the catering trade and others not – and what have been the key factors influencing progress. Harbottle provides a rare, elaborate account of

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<sup>16</sup> Chinese restaurants are the most popular type of restaurant in the UK (45%) (Mintel International Group Limited, 2004).

the relative failure of Iranian restaurants in Britain (Harbottle, 1997a; Harbottle, 2000). The lack of Afro-Caribbean or African businesses in the catering sector has puzzled others (Craven, 1968; Driver, 1983; see also Ram et al., 2000):

For instance, restaurant critics and others have often noted the failure of black cultures (whether African or West Indian) to help themselves to economic self-sufficiency and cultural assimilation in Britain by opening restaurants and food shops whose appeal to their own people would gradually extend to the public at large. (Driver, 1983: 93)

Craven was fascinated in the 1960s by the fact that unlike other communities, such as the Cypriots or the Polish, Africans hadn't established a range of local services and shops catering for their own needs, even though many of them came from commercially-oriented societies and not all were studying or planning to return to Africa as soon as possible (Craven, 1968: 5). She assumed that the way in which they were scattered throughout London, without forming tight-knit, stable local groups had a part to play in the matter.

Despite the acknowledgement that West Indians and Africans have played a minor role in the food and catering trade in Britain, not much research has been undertaken among these communities in the past to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. The lack of involvement of Caribbeans or Africans in the catering sector has generally been seen as merely a reflection of their remarkably low levels of engagement in business of any type. Data from the 1991 census show that the percentage of self-employed is 6.0 for Black-Caribbeans and 8.1 for Black-Africans, but 20 and 23.9 for Indians and Pakistanis (18.8 Bangladeshi), respectively, and 27.2 for the Chinese (Barrett et al., 2001). Driver (1983) notes that the scarcity of eating places among the black (Caribbean or African) communities has sometimes been ascribed to a general lack of entrepreneurial, capital-forming skills or to material poverty at an earlier period of their history. He does not attempt to analyse the particular problem further, only suggests that the causes should be investigated at greater length. He thinks that the social

organisation and gendered division of labour may explain the problem (Driver, 1983: 93).

The successful expansion of Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine in Britain between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s has been attributed to patterns of migration (i.e. of Hong Kong Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi and Cypriots), and to the specific mixture of entrepreneurial aspiration among the migrants, as well as to the capacity of these cuisines for adaptation to the English palate (Driver, 1983). The latter point refers to one of the key characteristics of ethnic cuisines, *vulnerability* (i.e. the tendency to modify ethnic dishes to please the palate of the wider population), that Driver believes determines the success or spread of ethnic cuisine. Another of the five key factors is the extent of *differentiation* in each cuisine in the country of origin as well as in the new host country<sup>17</sup> (1983: 92-6).

Basu (2002) discusses at length the various factors which explain the establishment of migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship. For example, socioeconomic factors include not only the financial requirements of the venture, but also the entrepreneur's human capital or skills (or the want of such skills) as embodied in educational achievement, training and previous work experience, and access to information and knowledge that is unavailable to others, but may have been supplied by ethnic or non-ethnic networks (Basu, 2002). What Basu

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<sup>17</sup> Driver refers here to Goody's concept (Goody, 1982), differentiation arising, for example, from hierarchical divisions in the society; from regional variety in produce, recipes or both; or from the allocation of different foods to different ages or sexes. As an example, Indian cuisine is differentiated especially by region, religion and caste. Driver also points to the fact that the "differentiation that a cuisine exhibits on its own home ground may not survive export to this country: Mediterranean styles seem to be more vulnerable than oriental ones to British stunting and stereotyping." (Driver, 1983: 94) The three other variables mentioned by Driver are: *propensity to evolve*, *imitability*, and *accessibility* to strangers.

refers to without using the term is the significance of *social capital*, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, for the creation of small ethnic businesses (Bourdieu, 1986)<sup>18</sup>.

A number of studies highlight the role of social capital or community networks as a source of vital resource for ethnic firms (Portes, 1998). The resources include, for example, start-up capital, information about business opportunities, access to markets and a compliant and disciplined labour force. Unsurprisingly, many of the initial ethnic food stores and restaurants were established in areas with a higher concentration of co-ethnic residents (Basu, 2002). The concentration of migrant groups into ethnic enclaves provided a 'protected market' which catered for the special, culturally based tastes of fellow ethnic group members (Aldrich et al., 1985: 996).

A significant socioeconomic factor affecting supply is the culinary skills and abilities of the migrants, or their lack of any other specialist skills (Basu, 2002). For example, many lascars from east Bengal or Bangladesh serving on British ships worked as cooks before they arrived in Britain, making the food-catering sector an attractive option. Once in businesses these men provided opportunities for others, highlighting again the significance of networks. In the case of the Chinese, the rapid expansion of the Chinese restaurant trade between 1956-65 in Britain was facilitated by simultaneous changes in the world rice markets which forced former rice farmers in Hong Kong's rural territories out of their traditional occupations and to join an informal network of chain migration, in which migrants already in the catering business provided family dependents and relatives with airfares and accommodation in return for employment as catering staff (Chan, 2002). Watson (1977) shows that a lot of the workers were actually from a single

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<sup>18</sup> For Bourdieu, social capital refers to "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu, 1986: 248) According to Portes, who has synthesized the growing literature, social capital focuses on the benefits accrued to individuals by virtue of partaking in groups and on the intentional construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource (Portes, 1998).



lineage village. The Chinese example also highlights that for the proliferation of ethnic restaurants to take place, a change in demand by the wider population needs to occur too (Basu, 2002; Driver, 1983; Watson, 1977).

Finally, it is worth noting that the above literature on ethnic business development is largely gender blind, for the issue of gender has not been discussed. A lot of the related literature focuses nevertheless on the experiences of the male labourers recruited into the catering business (Watson, 1975; Watson, 1977). As Ip and Lever-Tracey point out, there are very few studies on ethnic small businesses that have focused explicitly on the circumstances and contributions of women (Ip & Lever-Tracy, 1999). It has been argued that the entrepreneurs in the ethnic enclaves are men, while the exploited workers are women. Focusing on the Chinese, Lee et al. describe that

whilst both Chinese migrant men and women in the family-run catering business work long and anti-social hours, women generally bear the brunt of the social and economic marginality such as living imposes. They lack education and speak little English; they are extremely isolated in their homes and are characterized by their children as 'helpless'. (Lee et al., 2002: 609)

#### **1.2.4. Foodways in flux in the private domain**

##### ***The significance of the home environment***

Even though more established migrant or ethnic minority communities are able to enjoy home cooking in 'ethnic' restaurants (where the food is commonly prepared and served by men), in many other instances the lack of such venues means that households or homes remain the only settings where ethnic food can be found (characteristically the domain of women). For example in Australia, a far smaller Cuban community maintain "a Cuban world in their domestic space through the practice of eating Cuban food, rather than in the public domain." (Charon Cardona, 2004: 41) While the Cuban houses Charon Cardona visited in Australia displayed very few visible symbols or markers of the ethnicity of their Cuban inhabitants, the aroma of the coffee offered to guests and "the continuous

invitations to stay longer for lunch and/or dinner, or at least a small snack” had ‘cubanised’ the homes (2004: 42). Similarly, the Vietnamese in Australia associate Vietnamese food with domestic space, although in Vietnam food was available to them on the streets at any time (Thomas, 2004). Vietnamese restaurants exist in Australia, but the food is not perceived to be as good as that served at home.

The home, or the private domain in broader terms, is indeed the formative arena for the production and consumption of migrant or ethnic foodways in the new environment. It is where food is transformed into “the essence of identity” and “the focal point of loyalty” (Diner, 2001: 73). Although Kalcik in the following refers to established ethnic minority communities in the USA, it applies to more recent migrant groups as well:

Many ethnic foodways are practised in the private domain, among family members or in-group members, in the home, the neighbourhood, the church hall, or at special-in-group functions. This makes them safe symbols of identity for kin and group members to manipulate. (Kalcik, 1984: 55)

The significance of the domestic and other private settings derives naturally from the way in which culture-specific food habits are learned through socialization. As Warde states,

above all it is the family as a commensal unity which is the primary institutional vehicle for providing the reassurance of confirmed and shared standards for culinary judgement. While individualization challenges and disrupts its function, the practical experience and emotional significance of family cooking remain a preponderant force behind most people's tastes for food. (Warde, 1997: 184)

Baranowski's review reveals that there is not an extensive literature on family influences on diet (Baranowski, 1997), and that more systematic and comprehensive understanding of how families influence consumption is required. Jerome states that

most nutrition researchers overlook the fact that eating is a social activity in every society, requiring the involvement of gatekeepers and significant others in food-consumption processes. ... Dietary patterns of a respondent's household or family are rarely considered in a nutrition researcher's decision-making process, although in most social systems, decisions about food consumption are based on the needs, capacities, preferences, and financial situation of the family household group. (Jerome, 1997: 1166S)

Also Pertti and Gretel Peltó draw attention to the fact that “the significant sharing of cultural resources is anchored in households, where a great deal of day-to-day social interaction and problem-solving goes on” and, therefore, “the focus of studies in intra-cultural and intra-community diversity will frequently benefit from the use of *households* as the basic unit of observation” (Peltó & Peltó, 1975: 13, emphasis in original).

The failure to consider households as a whole has been a characteristic of nutritional sciences, but not of anthropological and sociological research (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Goode et al., 1984b; Kemmer et al., 1998a; Whitehead, 1984). This is in line with the strengthening of the social anthropology of food as a discipline and the recognition of the sociology of food and eating as a sub-discipline of sociology (Wood, 1995). It is these studies that examine the way in which family members influence food choice, the role of food, feeding and eating within families in general, and how food behaviour can be studied within a household setting. Most of the studies have recently been reviewed by a number of authors (e.g. Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; e.g. Jansson, 1995; Lupton, 1996; Wood, 1995). It is worthwhile noting that many of the studies have concentrated on the female head of the family, or that only families with children have been questioned. Among the Iranian community in the UK, Harbottle managed to involve most members of the households in her study (Harbottle, 2000).

*Acculturation – the modification of food habits*

Although migrant or ethnic minority foodways have generally been seen to be strictly conservative in nature, various external and internal pressures contribute to their gradual modification.

The extent to which foodways remain unchanged is determined by the pattern of activities of group members. Outmigration, intermarriage, and occupational and educational mobility are all factors that change social interaction and thus tend to be followed by change in foodways. (Institute of Medicine (U.S.) Committee on Opportunities in the Nutrition and Food Sciences, 1994: 184)

According to Kalcik, acculturation processes begin when the new ethnic groups or individuals arrive in the new host country and “experience the push-pull of cross inclinations about maintaining their traditional foodways.” (Kalcik, 1984: 39)

All immigrants and their succeeding generations find their traditional foodways altered to some degree. All have to make compromises which they pass on. (1984: 40)

Yet, den Hartog (1995) emphasises the point that migrants generally adapt only partially to the local food pattern and that only a few new foods are taken on or assimilated into the diet. One of the consequences of the modifications to the food habits of the migrant and ethnic minority community is that these impact on the range and diversity of traditional foodways for successive generations:

The struggles of the immigrant generation to keep, adapt, and shed their traditional foodways affect the repertoire of foodways that succeeding generations can call upon to use in symbolic displays of ethnic identity. In many cases the struggle to keep or give up ethnic food habits continues into the succeeding generations as they struggle to adjust their sense of ethnic identity and their relationship to the larger unit of American society. (Kalcik, 1984: 41)

The term acculturation<sup>19</sup> is generally used to describe the phenomena which occur when groups of individuals with different cultures come into permanent direct contact, with ensuing changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Jamal, 1996). Earlier researchers used the term ‘assimilation’ a great deal, and assumed that changes in the consumption and behavioural patterns resulted only in the migrant and ethnic minority community, not in the

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<sup>19</sup> Kalcik also uses the term hybridization but merely as a synonym for acculturation (Kalcik, 1984).

new host society, full assimilation implying identical consumption habits. Although most of the research on acculturation has taken place in migrant and ethnic minority communities, studies among the majority population, such as Jamal's, clearly show that two-way, or reciprocal, adaptation is possible<sup>20</sup> (Jamal, 1996). Furthermore, current assumptions about acculturation allow for diverse outcomes and presume that individuals have some choice in shaping these outcomes. As Arcia et al. state,

they also recognize that many immigrants are grounded in two or more cultures, such that successful adaptation is currently more likely to be defined as the ability to participate effectively in each culture. (Arcia et al., 2001: 42)

Adel den Hartog lists some of the key variables influencing the process of adaptation of migrants to the food patterns of the new environment: 1) similarity or difference of migrant and host food cultures; 2) nature and duration of stay; 3) the degree of necessity of adaptation; and 4) the perception of migrants of the duration of their stay (den Hartog, 1995: 62). den Hartog believes that changes in the food habits of migrants occur for two main reasons: 1) as a result of a relative increase in prosperity; and 2) because of the new environment. Change in the first instance occurs when migrants have more means to spend on food as compared to their country of origin. Consequently, they may consume more of already known foods such as meat, dairy products, vegetables, fruits and soft drinks. The second point is very broad, but den Hartog restricts his analysis to the time women spend preparing food and to the influence of the second generation, i.e. the children of migrants born in the host country.

Age or generation is, indeed, one of the key factors affecting changes in the foodways of a migrant or ethnic minority group. In general, age influences not only the choice of food but also the patterning of consumption in respect to meals and snacks, and the timing of eating. Commonly, the first generation, especially

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<sup>20</sup> The term interculturalism is also used in this context.

those who are older when they migrate, hold on to their traditional foodways longer than the second generation (Bush et al., 1998; Caplan et al., 1998). Research shows that children are often the first ones to take on foodways of the dominant culture and that in many cases they introduce their parents to new foods and tastes (Darmon & Khlai, 2001; Harbottle, 2000). For example, Harbottle (2000) noticed that among Iranian families who had resided in Britain for a long period, there was indication of the development of new social categories and the establishment of distinct differences between childrens' and adults' food habits. This did not occur in families who had recently arrived in Britain. Harbottle's study provides, in fact, an interesting in-depth account of the complexity and fluidity of Iranian youth cultures in Britain and how this is revealed through food and eating habits. Harbottle contends that

young Iranians living in multicultural cities in Britain, are not situated between two mutually exclusive and primordial cultural systems, being tugged in two opposite directions. Rather the ethnicities from which they select elements are already plural and multivocal. (Harbottle, 2000: 129)

Kalcik (1984) mentions several other factors affecting changes in the food habits of migrant or ethnic minority groups. These are largely similar to factors affecting food habits of the majority population: household income, the occupation of the breadwinner, the education of the cook, household composition, and gender (see e.g. Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Caplan et al., 1998).

Gender influences food preferences so that men and women do not always eat the same foods in the same amounts (Caplan et al., 1998), or they eat specific foods (Counihan, 1999). 'Light' foods, such as salad, chicken or yoghurt, are often associated with women, and 'heavy' foods, like red meat, beer and potatoes, with men (Counihan, 1999; Lupton, 1996). Men's tastes and preferences have been found to take priority over those of women and children in several cultural contexts (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1999). Mäkelä, however, draws attention to the fact that over the past decade or so the role of

children is growing (Mäkelä, 2000). Perhaps most significantly, however, gender affects food preparation responsibilities (see chapter 6).

The category of heavy and light foods has also been used to distinguish people according to class attributes. Analysing French consumption patterns, Bourdieu noticed that as income rose, the proportion of income spent on leaner, lighter, non-fattening and generally more expensive foods increased, and the proportion spent on heavy, fattening and cheap foods declined (Bourdieu, 1984). Consumption patterns were also dependent on the level of 'cultural capital', those with less cultural capital tending to eat heavier foods<sup>21</sup>. According to Bourdieu, taste is a product of living conditions, rather than income. While the working class is defined by tastes of necessity, the upper class is characterised by tastes of luxury (Bourdieu, 1984: 177). Taste, therefore, has a competitive dimension in that conceptions of taste and actual consumption practices are used to produce and maintain *distinctions* between social classes and to sustain the elevated status of those groups at the higher levels of class hierarchy. Since lower status-groups seek to emulate the habits of the better-off, this leads to a continual process of change and innovation (Caplan et al., 1998; Mintz, 1985).

Diner points out that "distinctions in diet between rich, poor, and the various gradations in between have been observed in most places at most times"<sup>22</sup> (Diner, 2001: 6). This may be valid for the West; interestingly, however, differentiation or distinction according to social class has not traditionally been apparent in various African societies, quantity of food being in some instances the only distinctive feature (de Garine, 1980; Dei, 1991; Goody, 1982; Okere,

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<sup>21</sup> As an example, the *nouveau riche* who possessed high economic capital but low cultural capital were more likely to eat very heavy and expensive foods, but those in well-paid professional classes with both economic and cultural capital tended towards lighter and more delicate foods. Highly educated, but less well-off people, such as teachers, who possessed more cultural than economic capital, inclined towards ascetic rather than conspicuous consumption, with a preference for inexpensive original (peasant dishes) and exotic foods (Bourdieu, 1984).

1983; Rasmussen, 1996; Spittler, 1993). What de Garine contends for the Massa, Mussey and Tupuri, appears to be valid elsewhere in Africa as well:

The traditional diet enjoying the highest prestige is not what is eaten by an elite, as yet ill-differentiated. It is above all the daily diet which was consumed by the ancestors and is still based on the staple food. ... The status of human being, properly integrated into the frame of a society, is initially conferred by the consumption of the staple food, the daily bread. (de Garine, 1980: 54)

Goody believes that in the aftermath of colonialism, Africans emulated the habits of Europeans partly because they did not have alternative or differentiated recipes either for feasts or for class – in other words, they lacked *haute cuisine* (Goody, 1982).

Not many studies involving migrants have looked at the influence of social class on food consumption habits in detail (Williams et al., 1998). In the migration context, the whole issue of class can become distorted, as the economic system of the host culture “creates or limits food choice through the range of occupations and incomes obtainable.” (Williams et al., 1998: 268) On the other hand, higher educational levels have been found to influence positively the acceptance of foods of the host country (Yang & Read, 1996). Furthermore, some migrants find themselves in very complex situations, as Ruud’s research among the Pakistani community in Norway highlights (Ruud, 1998). Although a large number of the Pakistani households have low incomes, it is important for them to present a successful image in the migration process. Many also have economic obligations to their families in Pakistan. Therefore, they spend very little money on everyday food, cutting down the amount of meat and fruit they consume regularly and preferring inexpensive vegetables in season. On the other hand, to give the impression of high social status, a lot of money is spent on festive meals and

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<sup>22</sup> There are several studies which show that class remains a strong predictor of food consumption patterns in the UK (Tomlinson, 1994; Tomlinson, 2003; Tomlinson & Warde, 1993) and other European countries (Hupkens et al., 2000; Prättälä et al., 1992; Prättälä et al., 2003; Roos et al., 1996; Roos et al., 1999).



social arrangements. “The outlay related to the provision of festive meals has a high priority compared to other expenses.” (Ruud, 1998: 180)

Caplan et al. remind us that foodways and food consumption are multifunctional:

while each of these factors is significant in itself, none can be discussed in isolation: each articulates with others in a complex way, leading to shifts in behaviour associated with food according to context and over time. (Caplan et al., 1998: 182)

### **1.3. Change and maintenance of foodways – levels of analysis**

This section looks in more detail at the various levels at which change in foodways can be observed in the new environment. I have used the term foodways as a synonym for food habits, and as defined by Germov and Williams, it is very broad and includes almost any activity or matter linked with food and eating:

Food habits and practices with respect to food acquisition, food preparation, food storage, distribution of food among family members, meal and snack patterns, food combinations, uses of food, beliefs about food, and identification of core, secondary, and peripheral foods in the diet. (Germov & Williams, 1999: 315)

In the first instance, I will look at food items. One of the main points is that the focus on food items alone distorts the actual modification (or maintenance) of food habits. Food items called substitutes help preserve traditional meals of migrants.

The two remaining parts deal in more detail with *meals*, which can be seen to be the product of culture (Lévi-Strauss, 1966a). As Mäkelä indicates, there are three relevant dimensions of meals that can be distinguished: meal format, eating pattern, and the social organisation of eating (Mäkelä, 2000: 7). While the meal format deals with the composition or structure of the main course and the sequence or progression of the whole meal, the eating pattern takes the time or rhythm of eating, the number of eating events and the alternation of hot and cold meals and snacks into consideration. These issues form the substance of the

second part of this section. The social organisation of eating refers to where and with whom people eat, and who did the cooking. The third and fourth parts will look into these aspects in more detail.

Most of the relevant research reviewed below has been conducted in the West. However, considering the nature of my research, in the second section on meal formats and eating patterns an African perspective on the subject is presented.

### **1.3.1. Food items and the process of substitution**

The focus of most nutritional studies on food habits of migrants has been on food items and nutrients, which have enabled the assessment of the nutritional quality of the diet. A common tool used in assessing dietary intake has been the food frequency questionnaire (Sevak et al., 2004; Sharma et al., 1996; Sharma et al., 2002; Sharma et al., 1999; Vyas et al., 2003) which allows comparisons between groups but is not suitable for estimating absolute values and is beset with other limitations (Vyas et al., 2003).

Some of the more anthropologically oriented studies have attempted to define the food system of migrants by reducing it to a collection of individual food items, explaining continuity in terms of food item use and change in shifts in items used and their frequency (Goode et al., 1984b; Jerome, 1980). Food items have also served as a basis of some of the models or theories created to explain dietary change in the context of migration. For example, although the models of Koctürk and Jerome differ to a certain degree, they focus on food items as an analytical element and identify “core, secondary, and peripheral foods” (Germov & Williams, 1999: 315) in the diet, although they use slightly different terminology (Jerome, 1980; Koctürk-Runefors, 1991; Koctürk, 1995).

Looking at Tahire Koctürk’s model in more detail, three food groups form its basis: staple foods, complementary foods and accessory foods (Koctürk-

Runefors, 1991; Koctürk, 1995). The staple, at the core of the circle model, generally a carbohydrate-rich food, is the principal component of most meals or accompanies most dishes<sup>23</sup>. According to Koctürk the staple is the most important constituent of the meal because it defines the affiliation of the cuisine. She believes it is hard to compose culture-specific meals if the correct staple is not available. "Its role is central, probably because of the difficulty to substitute it with another item without changing the affiliation of the dish." (Koctürk, 1995: 2) Complementary foods that accompany the staple are the next in the circle model, denoting their secondary role (irrespective of their nutrient value). They are generally one or several items from four food groups (meat/fish/eggs, milk/cheese, vegetables and legumes). Koctürk explains that complements are given different degrees of priority in different cultures and that sometimes they can be exchanged without endangering an entire food tradition. The accessory foods form the outer circle of the model, indicating their tertiary role. The foodstuffs in this group are fats, herbs and spices, sweets, nuts, fruits and drinks, and Koctürk sees them as accessories to the basic foods (the staple and complements) "because their culinary role is mainly to enhance the palatability and presentability of meals." (1995: 3) She believes that although a food tradition suffers in the absence of its accessory foods, they are not necessary for its survival.

Koctürk sees the change in food habits proceeding from the outer shell of the model towards the core. In other words, a diet begins to alter with the addition of new types of accessory foods to different complements and finally to the

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<sup>23</sup> Despite apparent similarities with Koctürk's model, Jerome's core items are not restricted to carbohydrate-rich staples, but consist of those items that are used most frequently (Jerome, 1980). For example, the core items of breakfast may consist of meat, eggs, cereals and cereal products, butter, beverage and sweet condiments. The combination of various core items results in different types of breakfast 'meal patterns', lunch 'meal patterns', and so forth. Although Jerome applies terminology similar to that used in the next section, instead of looking at the structure (rules for sequencing, presenting and serving dishes), Jerome views the food system as composed of segments: items of high frequency, moderate frequency, and low frequency use (Goode et al., 1984b).

incorporation of new staple foods. “The closer the change proceeds towards the centre, the slower the change.” (1995: 4) Complements change with ease and between the two extremes.

Change in food habits seems to begin with accessory foods. This may be because of the peripheral role they play in meals as ‘taste-givers’ and because they usually can be substitutes without threatening a whole culinary tradition. As such the accessory foods seem to constitute the weakest point through which a culinary tradition can be infiltrated with new items (sweets, fats, spices, fruits, drinks). (Koctürk, 1995: 4)

For a nutritionist, who is concerned with the quality of the diet, the focus on food items is necessary for the assessment of changes in the intake of nutrients. Yet, according to Goode et al. there has been an overemphasis on food items as an analytical element (Goode et al., 1984b). Common findings of such studies are that successive generations continue to lose traditional items, feasts remaining the major residue of an ethnic pattern, and that ethnic identity as a household characteristic does not explain food item frequencies.

The problem with the food item approach is that it may provide a biased picture of the process of change and maintenance of ethnic food habits, and of the use of the various foodstuffs. Simply counting the frequency of foods appearing in pre-defined lists, household menus or shopping lists conceals the actual patterning of the food. As Douglas points out, “when the core selection corresponds to what is most cheaply and easily available, it gives an unjustified impression of assimilation of an immigrant population’s food habits.” (Douglas, 1984b: 7)

Douglas clarifies further:

Isolated food items in themselves do not make an ethnic diet; the ethnically distinctive aspect is in the patterning of a whole cycle of combinations; for another, new food materials can be nativized and then perceived as ethnic. ... Unless there are distinctive patterns, the food habits of immigrants cannot be compared with those of the host population once they have come to share the same resources. A count of what foods each group chooses to eat conceals the real distinctive element. (Douglas, 1984b: 28)

What Douglas refers to with nativization of food is linked with the creative practice of substitution, a relatively little researched phenomenon. William and Marla

Powers describe how the Oglala Sioux confined to a reservation in southwestern Dakota were forced to change their diet considerably by adopting new foodstuffs issued by the federal government, but in the process did not lose their old food categories (Powers & Powers, 1984). In the first stage of nativization, the Oglala applied native terms to the new foods in a systematic way: “the new food was analogized to an existing form, thus making the raw food or animals a metaphorical extension of a traditional concept.” (1984: 64) For example, cattle became ‘spotted buffalo’. In the second stage, a ritual or activity was performed to help qualify the new food as Indian. The ‘spotted buffalo’ was therefore hunted as if it *were* a buffalo.

Thus, in this double process of classifying and ritualizing, a cow became a kind of buffalo, coffee became a kind of medicine, bacon became a kind of fat, and granulated sugar became a kind of maple sugar .... (Powers & Powers, 1984: 64)

Within a ten-year period, new food items became acceptable not only as an integral part of their diet, but came to be regarded as ‘Indian’ food.

Focusing on modern day examples of substitutes, the Lebanese have used peanut butter to replace tahini before its availability improved in Sydney (Hage, 1997: 109), and Cubans in Australia have improvised and experimented with different types of maize to reconstruct the authentically Cuban flavour of a beloved Cuban dish, *tamales* (Charon Cardona, 2004).

In the context of migration, substitution is, according to Calvo, a response of migrants to limited financial means in obtaining imported ‘exotic’ food products (expensive and rare ingredients) necessary for the preparation of their ethnic dishes<sup>24</sup> (Calvo, 1982: 393). Financial resources present, therefore, a variable determining the level of ‘innovation’, which results in the practice of ‘substitution’

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<sup>24</sup> Calvo (1982) provides a thorough review of food in the context of migration, including a discussion on substitution. Interestingly, the few articles or papers discussing or describing substitution in more detail are in French.

of foodstuffs and the 'reconstitution' of dishes, "the recreation of the cultural element of the ethnic dish by resorting to similar, but more financially accessible, products." (1982: 394, translated from French by HT). Calvo defines substitution as a "material (and cultural) operation" which consists of making up for the missing ingredient, or ingredients (whether down to rarity or cost), of a dish with another one, or other ones, with similar qualities<sup>25</sup> (1982: 418). The aim of the practice is to 'reconstitute' an ethnic dish with the similar cultural characteristics ("*fait culturel*") as the original one by using a 'substitute' for the lacking ingredient.

In other words, the actual reconstitution of the ethnic dish follows on from the procedure of substitution (Calvo, 1982: 419). At this stage the different mixtures or blends of ingredients forming the cultural basis of the dish are reconstituted. The focus is on the sensory qualities of the mixtures or parts of the dish: the attempt is to restore the structure, the consistency, and the flavour or the smell of the dish, because the sensory qualities are even more important than the appearance. According to Calvo, this procedure is simply an example of "culinary simulation" achieved with the help of substitute ingredients, the result of which he calls "*le plat-simil*" (similar dish) (1982: 419).

Hence, the reconstitution process involves the handling and cooking of food to form part of a *meal*, the next level of analysis.

### 1.3.2. Structure and patterning of meals and eating

As Douglas already contends above, food items presented on their own don't constitute ethnic food or eating habits. What makes food distinctively ethnic and

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<sup>25</sup> Calvo recognises three forms of substitution (Calvo, 1982: 419). The first is the use of one substitute to replace the original one. Examples of foodstuffs that are frequently replaced include corn meal and diverse preparations from cassava or yam, as well as cassava leaves. The second form of substitution is where the combination of two ingredients replaces one foodstuff. Calvo mentions the preparation of "foufou" with semolina and potato starch. An example of the third form of substitution, in which the nature of replacement is slightly different from the above cases, is when red meat, such as mutton or beef, is substituted by veal.

bestows identity, is “the patterning of a whole cycle of combinations”. (Douglas, 1984b: 28) Or, as Nicod puts it, “each culture and each subculture has its own criteria of palatability and its own rules of permitted sequences and combinations.” (Nicod, 1980: 55) The focus in this section is on the way in which food items are organised into dishes and meals (i.e. meal format), and on the patterning of eating over a period of time (i.e. eating pattern). In each culture, there are group-shared systems of ideas or rules concerning both the meal format and the eating pattern, which ultimately influence (but not determine) the timing, order, and quantity of intake (Goode, 1989). For example, a common basic Western meal comprises three courses: a starter, a main course, and a dessert (Mäkelä, 2000).

My review of the literature in regard to African meals<sup>26</sup> revealed that meal formats in various African societies are also comparable, usually consisting of one course made up of two parts (de Garine, 1980; Dei, 1989; Dei, 1990; Dei, 1991; Fortes & Fortes, 1936; Goody, 1982; Okere, 1983; Rasmussen, 1996; Richards, 1939; Richards & Widdowson, 1936; Spittler, 1993; Tripp, 1992; Van Liere et al., 1996). Among savannah populations, the staple millet (and to a lesser extent sorghum) is usually prepared into a solid porridge or dumpling and eaten with a relish, typically containing vegetables (and legumes) and possibly meat or fish, depending on regional availability<sup>27</sup>. For example, among the Tallensi of northern

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<sup>26</sup> Most of the relevant studies related to eating and meals with an African context have been conducted on rural populations by (social) anthropologists (or to a lesser extent by nutritional scientists), with no sociologists attempting the terrain. The majority of the studies, or reports, I reviewed deal with food production and other agricultural issues, and/or with food preparation and use, some including more detailed dietary analysis as well. Although a number contain thorough descriptions of the structure of meals and patterning of eating, only a very few focus principally on these topics (Spittler, 1993). Furthermore, it appears that most of the pertinent studies have been conducted among savannah populations, although there are great differences between the people of the savannah and the people of the forest, the former living on cereals and latter on roots and fruits (Goody, 1982: 3). Not much relevant research has been published on urban populations, the majority of studies focusing on food security and nutrient intakes (Maxwell et al., 2000).

<sup>27</sup> The relish of the Kel Ewey nomads is different in that it consists of fermented camel's or goat's milk (Spittler, 1993)

Ghana, although vegetables are the foundation of every relish (a soup), meat is an indispensable ingredient of every “well-cooked meal” (Fortes & Fortes, 1936: 250). It is added in very small quantities, fresh, smoked or dried. Another essential part of the soup is red pepper, the most important seasoning which is never omitted. Other seasonings are used as well, and “the more pungent the soup the better it is liked.” (Fortes & Fortes, 1936: 269) Even though the variety of staples is far greater in the rain forest belt, many of which are tubers, the meals prepared seem to follow the same two-part structure. For example, among the Ayirebi of southern Ghana, the evening meal of *fufu* (see glossary) and soup is the most appreciated of all the meals. It makes a “good heavy meal” and it is seen as “a complete meal for its cultural value.” (Dei, 1991: 40) Many of the staples, such as *fufu*, *banku*, and *kokonte*, are prepared in a manner as to have a “remarkable degree of consistency and temperature” allowing the food to be rolled into a ball and dipped into the sauce or relish that goes along with it (Dei, 1991: 42). Among the Bemba, Richards (1939) observed that the relish has two functions: it makes the porridge (*ubwali*) easier to swallow, and also gives it taste. Due to the coarse texture of *ubwali*, “it needs a coating of something slippery to make it slide down the throat.” (Richards, 1939: 49) Indeed, *ubwali* cannot be eaten without the relish (*umunani*), and both together form the perfect meal.

As Goode (1989) points out, the study of food-pattern rules helps us understand *why* people eat what they do<sup>28</sup>. A further reason for paying attention to cultural rules for food use is that attempts to introduce new food items into a food system are likely to fail unless there is an understanding of the rules (Goode, 1989). Indeed, one of the aims of the classical study by Douglas and Nicod was to understand what kinds of food or food products could be introduced into the diet

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<sup>28</sup> Goode emphasises that although socially shared understandings contribute to choice, they do not determine it. In order to ascertain the social mechanisms for upholding pattern rules and to recognize their variety, variability and conditional nature, domestic and peer-group interaction needs closer analysis as well (Goode, 1989).



of the British working class (Douglas, 1972; Douglas & Nicod, 1974; Nicod, 1980). In their research of the structure of food and the food system they used and defined the basic terms 'food event', 'structured event', 'meal' and 'snack', which have subsequently been employed in a similar fashion by many other researchers too:

A 'food event' is an occasion when food is eaten, without prejudice as to whether it constitutes a meal or not. A 'structured event' is a social occasion, which is organised according to rules prescribing time, place and sequence of actions. If food is eaten as part of a structured event, then we have a 'meal'. A 'snack' is an unstructured food event, in which one or more self-contained food items may be served. 'Unstructured' means that there are no rules to prescribe which items should appear together, and no strict order of sequence when more than one item appears. Snacks may be sweet or savoury; separable from, but capable of accompanying a drink. The meal, by contrast, has no self-contained food items, and is strongly rule-bound as to permitted combinations and sequences. (Douglas & Nicod, 1974: 744)

In essence, what Douglas and Nicod found was that structural and sensory qualities embedded in the oppositions savoury/sweet, hot/cold, liquid/dry were essential in defining different types of meals, other criteria being complexity, copiousness and ceremoniousness (Douglas & Nicod, 1974). Furthermore, they reckoned that in highly structured parts of their diet (e.g. Sunday dinner and all dinners elaborating upon or modifying it) people would only be receptive to improved *quality* in the traditional foods, such as more meat, better meat, more varied vegetables, and richer gravy (Nicod, 1980). Innovations that lower the price or save on work would be in little demand. However, in the less structured parts (e.g. at breakfast) there would be "scope for introducing completely new kinds of food, new tastes and smells, cheap substitutes." (Douglas & Nicod, 1974: 744)

The analysis of the structure of meals and patterning of eating has been classified as a structuralist approach to studying food and eating (Mennell et al., 1992). Mennell et al. state that the "great virtue of the structuralist approach is that it clearly recognises that 'taste' is culturally shaped and socially controlled." (1992: 8) The assumption is that the various group-shared rules as regards

meals and cuisine are manifestations of deeper underlying structures. “Food categories therefore encode social events”, as Douglas concisely puts it (Douglas, 1972: 61)<sup>29</sup>. The rule-bound aspect of food makes it an instrument of communication. Yet, as Douglas points out, food is not necessarily structured to the same degree in each society (Douglas, 1984b). Mäkelä draws attention to the fact that

the whole idea of connecting meals to a wider social system in which a meal is one ordered system related to other ordered systems ... has been the dominant paradigm of sociology of food for the past 20 years. (Mäkelä, 2001: 127)

Structuralism has been criticized for not paying enough attention to biology and economics in explaining the origin and persistence of food habits and for not taking historical changes in food habits into consideration (see e.g. Caplan et al., 1998; Lupton, 1996). According to Wood (1995), some of the criticism is nevertheless unfounded. He believes that

structuralism ‘works’, at least for the analysis of meals, providing a valuable framework for understanding the plethora of meanings that people bring to food use and consumption. (Wood, 1995: 112)

Furthermore, Lalonde (1992) criticizes Douglas for not stressing the taste or sensory qualities of the meal. He maintains that “Douglas’s appreciation of flavour extends only as far as will allow tastes to be fitted into the syntagmatic relations of the meal-as-system”<sup>30</sup> (Lalonde, 1992: 76). Taste is purely a “passive phenomenon” and “an automatic reaction to certain stimuli” (1992: 76). Lalonde believes, however, that “taste is the sense par excellence that makes concrete the additional meaning in the meal-as-event.” (1992: 77) Since taste is a highly conscious act, it is less a matter of sensation, instead more a matter of

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Nicod’s research showed that the staple potato was the basis of the meal at which the family and only its more close friends gathered together. Bread set a boundary around a wider circle of people, and biscuits put a frame around yet more people, such as acquaintances, workmen and casual visitors (Nicod, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Already in her earlier influential study of eating patterns, Douglas drew attention to the structural and sensory qualities of the meal embedded in the binary oppositions savoury/sweet, hot/cold, liquid/dry (Douglas, 1972).

perception (1992: 78-9). Rozin too maintains that “flavour functions more specifically to define and illuminate the purpose and process of the event.” (Rozin, 2000: 141)

The research by Douglas and Nicod has, despite the critique, influenced many others in their research and writing about meals and eating (e.g. Charles & Kerr, 1988; Goode et al., 1984a; Goode et al., 1984b; Mäkelä, 1991; Mäkelä, 1993; Murcott, 1982; Prättälä & Helminen, 1990), including more recent research by Kemmer et al. (1998a), Kjaernes and colleagues (2001b), Lupton (2000), Marshall (2000), and Marshall and Anderson (2002). For example, the idea of a ‘proper meal’ has emerged as an important concept in the analysis of meals (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Kjaernes, 2001a; Mäkelä, 1996; Murcott, 1982; Murcott, 1983). What constitutes a proper meal varies according to cultural context and time. For instance, in Finland, the majority of women studied by Mäkelä saw the proper meal as *hot* food served with a *salad* eaten in *company* (Mäkelä, 1996).

Most studies of meals have been qualitative, in-depth studies of a small group of people, with few exceptions (Kjaernes, 2001b). Furthermore, most of them have focused on Western, non-migrant populations. The study of Goode et al. is therefore of particular interest as it looked at an ethnic minority community, second and third generation Italian Americans in Philadelphia (Goode et al., 1984a; Goode et al., 1984b). The researchers examined group-shared food patterns and aimed at understanding the social processes which are part of the transmission, reinforcement and modification of such group-shared patterns. The focus was on the structure of meal formats and meal cycles, the latter term referring to the “patterning of the use of different meal formats over time (the week, weekend, annual holiday cycle, and life cycle)” (Goode et al., 1984a: 72). The research revealed that the food system of the Italian American community was structured around the alternation or combination of two Italian formats,

‘gravies’ and ‘one-pots’, and one American meal format, ‘platters’ (Goode et al., 1984a; Goode et al., 1984b). The researchers discovered a range of other formats as well. Essentially, what was shared was a repertory of formats, and rules for when and for whom to use them. While some rules were specific, others permitted alternatives. Formats were influenced by community norms, activities, and attendance; the weekly menu structure, on the other hand, was very much dependent on individual preferences in terms of taste, health beliefs, and cost. On the complexity of continuity and change, the research showed that the rules for constructing and scheduling “gravy meals” which persisted over time were the focal point of continuity in the food system, not the frequency of pasta or tomato sauce (Goode et al., 1984b). The rules did not entail the use of particular foods, but there were rules for combining them in a variety of distinct dishes. Continuity and change in the system was to a high degree related to the manipulation of the repertory of formats. For example, formats such as gravy meals and buffet feasts were highly content specific, yet platter and party formats were open to negotiation. New American food items entered the system mainly through these open formats.

Much of the recent research on food habits and eating patterns has arisen from the concern about the fate of meals (Kjaernes, 2001b; Murcott, 1997; Poulain, 2002; Roos & Prättälä, 1997). One of the key questions is whether meal-taking as the primary vehicle of consumption is on the decline, and snacking is on the increase. Fischler (1980) believes that nibbling and snacking is on the increase, and that the institutionalised, ritualised meals – the highly socialised forms of the act of eating – are being increasingly eroded by or reduced to snacks. Consequently, “eating is becoming less of a social, and more of a strictly individual, practice.” (Fischler, 1980: 947; see also Poulain, 2002) The term ‘grazing’ has also been used, especially by food industry analysts, to describe the

dissolving of the structure of the meal into a pattern of irregular but frequent snacks (DeVault, 1991). Fischler calls this era 'gastro-anomy' because without rules for meal-taking, individuals are left normless, without clear socio-cultural cues as to what, when, how, and how much they should eat; hence they experience a growing sense of 'anxiety' (1980: 948).

Despite the concern for the future of meals, research conducted in various European countries suggests that hot or proper meals are still very much part of the meal pattern, in some countries more so than others (Mäkelä, 2001). On the other hand, research also shows that meal patterns and meal formats, as well as ideal rules of meals, are not strict and permanent, but evolve with time within the same culture (Prättälä & Helminen, 1990; Prättälä et al., 1993; Rotenberg, 1981). Even in a short period of time, general ideas concerning a proper meal can develop significantly, the pace and direction of change reflecting developments in other spheres of the society. Kemmer et al. found out that the ideal English meal revealed by a study by Murcott some fifteen years previously (Murcott, 1982) was now considered to be rather "dull, unimaginative and too much trouble to prepare, especially in terms of timing" (Kemmer et al., 1998a: 67), and that meals with very simple structures (e.g. pasta with sauce, risotto) were frequently preferred. Eating the same food together was, nevertheless, still of great importance.

My review of research carried out in African countries suggests that regular meals are also an essential part of the meal systems of this continent (de Garine, 1980; Dei, 1989; Dei, 1990; Dei, 1991; Fortes & Fortes, 1936; Goody, 1982; Okere, 1983; Rasmussen, 1996; Richards, 1939; Richards & Widdowson, 1936; Spittler, 1993; Tripp, 1992; Van Liere et al., 1996). The eating pattern is comparable in the various locations, most societies attempting to eat three meals a day, although some may only eat once or twice, largely depending on the season. The most frequently skipped meal is breakfast, which often consists of

food left over from the previous evening meal. Children are generally fed more often. A study carried out in two phases twelve years apart among rural Hausa-Fulani in northern Nigeria revealed that the meal pattern was a relatively stable element, while much else had changed (Ross et al., 1996).

In regard to nutritional studies involving migrants, although the main focus has generally been on food items and nutrients, some have paid attention to the meal pattern too (Anderson & Lean, 1995). A general finding has been that breakfast is the first and the main (evening) meal the last to change in character, the latter being associated with traditional cooking and eating together with other family members (Anderson & Lean, 1995; Wheeler & Tan, 1983). This last point takes us to the next level of analysis.

### **1.3.3. Social organisation of eating**

Concern for the fate of meals is linked with social aspects of eating. As we saw above, while eating alone has been connected with snacking, commensalism is usually associated with proper meals. Since meals are seen as an essential part of family life, there are concerns too about the continuation of *family meals* (Holm, 2001a; Murcott, 1997) in which all members of the family take part. It is also questioned whether the assumed disruption indicates an upheaval in family life and social life in general (Kjaernes et al., 2001).

Sobal points out that “analysts are often distracted by the food and overlook the eating, neglecting sociability as an important component of meals as social events.” (Sobal, 2000: 119) This is especially valid for nutritionally focused studies, but considering recent publications, less so for sociologically oriented research (Holm, 2001a; Holm, 2001b; Kemmer et al., 1998a; Kemmer et al., 1998b; Mäkelä, 1997; Sobal, 2000; Sobal et al., 2002; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). The importance of the social context in regard to eating events is underlined in

the models used in two recent studies carried out in Scandinavia: In Mäkelä's 'eating space', the dimension 'sociability of eating' outlines whether people are eating alone or with others, and deals also with various sitting, serving and eating orders (Mäkelä, 1991; Mäkelä, 1994; Mäkelä, 1996). In the 'eating system' model used in a collaborative survey carried out in four Nordic countries, the social organisation of eating considers where and with whom people eat, and who does the cooking (Kjaernes et al., 2001: 40). Here, I will mainly consider the issue of company, and the notion of family meals.

Eating together a meal with others, or commensality, signifies unity and sharing in most cultural contexts. Meals bring people together. As Holm states,

meals unite, they assemble groups, most often groups of the kind known as households or families, and they tend to do so at more or less regular intervals. Thereby meals form basic occasions for groups to discover themselves as groups. (Holm, 2001b: 160)

Hence, the most fundamental 'commensal unit' is the family; in Western societies in particular the *nuclear* family (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). Sobal and Nelson describe commensal units as "groups of people assembled at a particular time and specific place to consume meals, snacks or beverages" (2003: 181). 'Commensal circles', on the other hand, are networks of relationships that define the range of people with whom individuals could, and do, eat. Again, at the core of most commensal circles is the family (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Holm, 2001a). "Who someone shares food with locates them in the social world, revealing the types of people they are willing or not willing to include in their commensal circle", writes Sobal (2000: 123). Douglas noticed that in Britain "drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests." (Douglas, 1972: 66) Thus, meals draw the line between intimacy and distance; meals are a symbol of close friendship.

Here we return to issues discussed in the beginning section on foodways and identity: commensality is a signifier of community. As Van den Berghe contends,

our cuisine is the symbolic expression of our sociality, first in the intimate domestic sphere, and by extension with the larger group that shares our specific culinary complex: the inventory of food items, the repertoire of recipes, and the rituals of commensalism. (Van den Berghe, 1984: 392)

Sharing of meals in the wider community occurs in restaurants, pubs, festivals, wedding banquets, and so forth. Commensality helps initiate, build, confirm, deepen and reaffirm social connections (Sobal, 2000). Furthermore, as Sobal notes, “sharing of foods in commensal eating builds and reinforces mutual bonds of reciprocity that express shared sociability.” (2000: 124)

Considering family meals in more detail, several qualitative studies carried out in recent decades throughout Europe and the USA reveal that family meals are central in sustaining the cohesiveness of the family unit (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Holm, 2001a; Mäkelä, 1996; Mäkelä, 2002; Murcott, 1982; Murcott, 1983). Studies by Kemmer et al. and Sobal et al. show how the entry into marriage is associated with a shift towards a regular, substantial meal eaten by both partners at the same time (Kemmer et al., 1998a; Sobal et al., 2002). In Britain,

the evening meal was often regarded as an opportunity to sit down together, enjoy the same activity and the same food, and talk together. The importance of consuming the same foods rather than eating different meals but at the same time was not only to avoid the burden of additional food preparation but also to ensure that the eating of the meal was indeed a shared experience. (Kemmer et al., 1998a: 69)

In the West in general, as Sobal et al. encapsulate, “commensality is a key component of how people accomplish or ‘do’ marriage, with social norms prescribing shared eating as a crucial part of the marital relationship.” (2002: 380)

Family meals are part of ordinary everyday eating in households with and without children (Holm, 2001a). As Charles and Kerr noticed, for a meal to be proper all family members have to be present to consume it (Charles & Kerr, 1988). In



households with children, family meals provide an occasion to learn culture-specific food habits through socialization (see section 1.2.4) and for parents to teach children to eat ‘properly’, in a socially acceptable manner (Charles & Kerr, 1988: 229) by “setting an example” (DeVault, 1991: 50).

Despite social norms and ideals, research also shows that organising a shared family meal is not always so straightforward, which can be due to different schedules of family members (Mäkelä, 1996; Valentine, 1999) and even to lack of space (Charles & Kerr, 1988). Valentine’s study demonstrates how the home can be a site of “multiple consumption practices” (Valentine, 1999: 502), not only in terms of the contents of meals consumed, but also in regard to timing and location of eating.

With regard to meals in migrant or ethnic minority families, there are studies which also show that it can be difficult to maintain family meals in the new environment, usually due to irregular working hours, different activities and time schedules of family members (Ruud, 1998; Valentine, 1999). On the other hand, there is evidence that some migrants are able to adhere to family meals with all family members eating the same food, this being the case for the Chinese in London (Wheeler & Tan, 1983). In the historical analysis of migrant foodways in America, Diner describes how poor Italian migrants started using food for socializing and eating together as a family in their new homeland, although this practice had been limited to the rich in Italy (Diner, 2001: 61). In present day USA, people from ethnic minorities have been shown to eat more frequently in the homes of family members (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). In a similar fashion, migrant South Asian and Italian women in Glasgow prepare hospitable meals for other (extended) family members far more frequently than women from the general population (Bush et al., 1998).

### 1.3.4. Cooking, food preparation rules and gender

Cooking can be analysed from different points of view. Here I will consider two: food preparation rules, or cuisine rules, and the gendered division of labour.

Food preparation rules are at an intermediate level of organisation in a food system in that they stand between food items and meal formats (Goode, 1989). They consist of rules for combining items into dishes, which are culturally defined complexes of food items (Goode et al., 1984b) and the basic components of meals.

While the rules for structuring a dish are encoded in 'recipes' which may differ in detail from household to household, the basic structure of the dish or recipe is a group-shared, socially transmitted pattern. (Goode et al., 1984b: 147)

Cuisine rules not only include rules for combining or segregating items, but also refer to food preparation processes, cooking utensils used, heat application, and flavouring principles. Goode clarifies the importance of food preparation rules:

Cultural constructs that prescribe which foods 'go together' and which do not, and how types of food should be processed, cooked, and flavoured strongly influence the way in which new items are incorporated. They also partly determine why old items may be difficult to replace. Selecting the type of dish often determines the specific foodstuffs to be eaten. (Goode, 1989: 139-140)

Cuisine practices or manipulative techniques that can be observed include 1) processes that involve physical changes in size, shape or mass; 2) manipulation of water content (e.g. salting, dry curing); 3) manipulation of chemical changes (e.g. grilling, deep-frying, fermentation); and 4) flavouring (Goode, 1989). It is mainly anthropologically oriented research that has taken food preparation rules into consideration (e.g. Goode, 1989; Jerome et al., 1980; Richards, 1939).

Cooking and gender have been of interest in many Western sociologically oriented studies (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Ekström & Fürst, 2001; Jansson, 1995; Murcott, 1983; Sidenvall et al., 2001) many of which have concluded that there has been little change in regard to the gendered division of labour, women carrying out the bulk of everyday cooking. Men, especially young

men and those with middle or higher occupational status, have been found to contribute to the preparation of minor meals, such as breakfast, and special meals (Ekström & Furst, 2001). Domestic (food-) work has generally been perceived as being of less value and lower status than paid work in the public sphere, and equality between the sexes has been judged according to the extent to which women partake in paid labour and men are involved in housework (Harbottle, 2000).

Bourdieu believes that the taste for particular dishes is linked, through preparation and cooking, with the whole conception of the domestic economy and of the division of labour between the sexes (Bourdieu, 1984: 185). For example, a taste for casserole dishes which require a big investment in time and interest (e.g. pot-au-feu) is linked to a traditional conception of woman's role, which is maintained in the lower social classes. Upper class women, on the other hand, whose labour has a high market value, spend more time on child care and the transmission of cultural capital, contesting the traditional division of domestic labour. They prefer lighter foods that need less preparation and cooking time, such as grilled meat and fish and raw vegetables. (Bourdieu, 1984: 186)

With regard to migrant communities, there are not many studies that have analysed the social context of food preparation in detail. Yet, as Borda (1987) shows, migration may alter traditional gender roles in such a manner that men take on tasks previously associated with women. Latin American refugee men in Sweden took on the baking of bread for social gatherings and the cooking of special Latin American food at weekends for family and friends. On the other hand, Ruud (1998) highlights the importance of the maintenance of the gendered division of labour in regard to cooking by Pakistanis in Norway. The culinary skills of the women and the way in which they manage the household are important contributors to their status and self-respect: "it is through the food habits that the

Pakistani mother exercises her most important role in the socialisation process (of children), and, in so doing strongly identifies with the Pakistani culture.” (Ruud, 1998: 180)

In a similar fashion, Harbottle’s research on the Iranian community shows that great value is attributed by both men and women to the affective and aesthetic aspects of food preparation in the domestic sphere, and that Iranian women clearly derive considerable power and influence from their food-work (Harbottle, 2000: 14). Women spend a significant amount of emotional energy, as well as time and skill, in preparing food, and the high status of domestic food-work is partly related to the importance accredited by parents to the appropriate feeding of their children and to the safeguarding of their health and well-being.

Furthermore, there is evidence from different cultural contexts that through food exchange or gifts, everyday or special meals, women are provided with a culturally sanctioned capacity to obtain influence through commanding reciprocal commitments, mainly among family and friends (Counihan, 1999; Theophano & Curtis, 1991; Werbner, 1990).

Considering the above findings one can question whether the assumption about the lower status of housework is valid in all cultural contexts. For example, a Glaswegian study among women of different ethnic origins (South Asian, Italian and general population) indicated dissimilarities in regard to the significance of meal preparation and cooking for the various groups (Bush et al., 1998). There were also differences in attitudes and practices in regard to cooking among first and second generation migrants, which also varied according to the ethnic group. Harbottle (2000) calls for more refined analyses of gendered relations and actual tasks performed by domestic cooks. This thesis is a contribution to this area.

## **1.4. Conclusion**

This literature review has discussed literature in two major areas: a) migration, foodways, ethnic identities and gender with focus on both public and private spheres; and b) levels at which change in foodways can be studied or observed in the new environment including the gendered division of labour in relation to food-work.

It has become apparent that most of the research on migrant foodways in the UK has been carried out by nutritional scientists with the main focus on the nutritional quality of the diet and that there is only limited social science research which directly considers the links between ethnic identities and foodways. There is sparse information on West Africans – whether related to their food habits or to their experiences in the UK – and on the influence of colonialism and post-colonialism on the foodways and identities of migrants from former colonies, to which West Africans can be counted.

In regard to foodways in the public sphere, although there is literature on the development of the migrant and ethnic minority catering trade in Britain, it does not consider the lack of food-related businesses among the Black African community. Focusing on the private sphere, although there is a body of social science literature on food and eating within families, only few of these more in-depth studies have been undertaken in migrant households, involving all family members in the research, and gendered analysis is rare.

Considering the second topic area, it has become apparent that food items have been used not only in nutritional studies but also in social science research to describe the change of food habits among migrants and their descendants, with apparent limitations. Although the structural analysis of meals and patterning of eating have been part of anthropologically and sociologically oriented research

for a few decades now, not many studies have considered migrants. Furthermore, the role of substitutes is poorly documented, especially in the English language literature.

By focusing on the foodways of a West African community in London, the aim of this study is to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge. The study is grounded in qualitative and theoretical research on meals, much of which has utilized and further elaborated the theoretical framework of Douglas and Nicod. With regard to the analytical model presented in the next section, apart from Douglas and Nicod (Douglas, 1972; Douglas & Nicod, 1974; Nicod, 1980), the work of various other scholars influenced my thinking, in particular Goode et al. (1984a, 1984b), Mäkelä (1993, 1994, 1996), Murcott (1982, 1983) and Whitehead (1984). I was also inspired by Jack Goody's research on food practices in northern Ghana (Goody, 1982; Goody & Goody, 1995) and by other writing on African food and dietary practices (e.g. Dei, 1991; Spittler, 1993; Tripp, 1992).

The literature review established the strong relationship between food, or food culture, and individual and collective ethnic identities. The maintenance of previous eating habits and customs in migrant and ethnic minority communities forms a significant aspect of their remembered and reconstituted ethnic identities. Ethnic food represents a symbolic and cultural connection with the country of origin. The establishment of grocery stores and restaurants forms a natural development in the migration process and is an important step in regenerating the migrant and ethnic minority community by providing places of cultural identification and reminders of social commonality in the public sphere. The private domain of the home remains, nevertheless, the main arena for the performance of migrant and ethnic minority foodways. Modification of food habits is still inevitable, especially among the second generation. Gender, SES, length

of stay in the host country, and household size and composition also influence the process and level of acculturation.

This study makes an original empirical contribution by focusing on a gap in the existing research – the lack of material on African migrant households and the lack of gendered analysis of the maintenance and transformation of foodways – and extends theoretical understandings of food as a symbolic expression of culture and ethnic identity.

## **2. SETTING AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research questions**

This thesis examines the relationships between migration, foodways, ethnic identities, and gender which are explored through a case study of Ghanaians in London.

The main research questions were:

1. How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels?
2. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups?
3. What is the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities?

The micro-level analysis of food habits within Ghanaian households was set in a wider context by a gendered analysis of the development of the food culture in the community as a whole. Hence, while the focus as regards foodways at the micro-level was on the various spheres of the eating system, the broader study of food and eating in the community meant that the availability or distribution of ethnic (Ghanaian/African) food, and food acquisition were relevant. At the household level, the aim was to undertake a gendered analysis of the structure of eating as an integral part of everyday life.

### **2.2. Setting**

#### **2.2.1. Ghanaians in London**

The reason I focused on Ghanaians and not any other West African group was purely a matter of practicality. Having carried out small-scale research into the



food habits and food behaviour of Ghanaian students living in Germany, with an explorative two-month visit to Ghana in 1994, I was better positioned to continue research among this population group (Tuomainen, 1995; Tuomainen, 1996). The grounds for not including any other West Africans in the study was to avoid the problems associated with grouping people of similar broad geographical origins in one study (Kassam-Khamis et al., 2000). While the 1991 census counted 32,672 people in the UK who were born in Ghana, in 2001 the figure for England and Wales was 55,537, with females exceeding males by over 2000 (28,846 vs. 26,691) (Office for National Statistics).

The reason for choosing London as the study site was that, similarly to other Black Africans in the UK (Elam et al., 2000), the majority (over 80 percent) of the Ghanaian-born population live there (Storkey & Lewis, 1996). The 1991 census counted 26,925 people living in London who were born in Ghana (Storkey & Lewis, 1996). 80 percent of the total figure for 2001 is 44,430. However, the size of the Ghanaian community is likely to be very much larger than this. The above figures do not include those born in the UK, i.e. second and third generation descendants of migrants. Furthermore, non-response in official surveys is very high among Black Africans from British Commonwealth Countries (Simpson, 2002) and the proportion of illegal migrants is likely to be high as well (Mazzucato, 2005), so it is very difficult to approximate an accurate figure.

Most information about Ghanaians in London or the UK is contained in research carried out among Black Africans in general (Daley, 1996), with very few studies focusing on Ghanaians in particular (Elam et al., 2000; Henry & Mohan, 2003). Further research among Ghanaians has been carried out abroad, especially in Canada (Konadu-Agyemang, 1999; Wong, 2000), the USA (Attah-Poku, 1996) and the Netherlands (Mazzucato, 2005).

The following extract from a BBC website dedicated to Ghanaians in London provides a synopsis of history:

Britain's role in the colonisation of Africa and the slave trade meant that Ghanaians, either by force or, in time, through trade, have found themselves living and partaking in London life from the seventeenth century onwards. At first most Ghanaians were part of the transient community of sailors around London's Docklands. Today, Ghanaians live across London but are concentrated around Dalston, Brixton and Lewisham. The pull of employment and education opportunities and, in turn, the love of their homeland has insured a steady flow of Ghanaians to and from London over the last hundred years or more. Some Ghanaians in London fled political oppression and turmoil but in the last decade there has been political stability in Ghana making return possible for political refugees.

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/yourlondon/unitedcolours/ghanaian/welcome\\_history.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/yourlondon/unitedcolours/ghanaian/welcome_history.shtml))

Through increased investment in the region by American and British businesses, return migration has been a favourable option for a large number of other Ghanaians too (Elam et al., 2000), which perhaps partly explains the smaller number of male Ghanaians in the UK at present<sup>31</sup>.

Community representatives in Elam's et al. (2000) study mentioned Tottenham, Islington, Hackney, Wood Green, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth as areas with a higher concentration of Ghanaians. Furthermore, the Ghanaian community is ethnically mixed, with no one tribe settling in a different place to others.

As already indicated, Ghanaians, like other West Africans, have high levels of education. The following table shows the level of qualifications for Ghanaians in the 2001 census.

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<sup>31</sup> Elam's et al. study on four African communities in the UK showed that women were thought to find it easier to obtain employment and access housing, whereas men suffered from higher levels of unemployment and a loss of social status (Elam et al., 2000).

**Table 2.1.** Educational qualifications of Ghana-born population (16-74 year olds) in England and Wales in 2001 (Office for National Statistics).

<b>All people by educational qualification</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
	<b>percentage of 16-74 year olds</b>		
All people	52,052	24,909	27,143
No qualifications or level unknown	18.0	13.9	21.7
Lower level qualifications	46.1	43.6	48.4
Higher level qualifications	35.9	42.5	29.9

Despite their high educational levels, only a minority of Ghanaians work in such professions as medicine or business. Other Ghanaians proliferate in manual and non-manual service sector occupations (Daley, 1996). In the UK, many have low status positions within the NHS. A great number of Ghanaians are also 'student workers': full-time students who work part-time and full-time workers who study part time or at evening classes. Others may be working illegally (Daley, 1996). The following table shows the occupation of 16-74 year people born in Ghana, based on the 2001 census.

**Table 2.2.** The occupation of Ghana-born population (16-74 year olds) in England and Wales in 2001 (Office for National Statistics).

<b>All people by occupation</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
	<b>percentage of 16-74 year olds</b>		
All people	52,052	24,909	27,143
Managers and Senior Officials	7.2	9.0	5.5
Professional Occupations	8.8	12.1	5.7
Associate Professional and Technical Occups.	11.5	10.7	12.3
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	10.4	7.9	12.7
Skilled Trades Occupations	4.6	5.6	3.6
Personal Service Occupations	9.8	4.4	14.7
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	7.3	5.5	8.9
Process; Plant and Machine Operatives	5.6	8.8	2.7
Elementary Occupations	17.9	19.3	16.6
Inadequately described	16.9	16.6	17.2

Elam's et al. informants viewed London as a 'leveller':

This view was illustrated with anecdotes, for example about 'African princes now cleaning windows' or people who were once in position of power now mixing with people they would not have normally met when they lived in Africa. People described how they had led different lives back home and found themselves doing things, for example going to markets when they previously didn't have to go shopping; or professionals and unskilled people working alongside each other, for example in hotels or as minicab drivers. (Elam et al., 2000: 19)

The transnational nature of the Ghanaian community is reflected in Daley's account on Black Africans, which is particularly valid for Ghanaians:

It is not peculiar for a spouse (either husband or wife) to permanently reside in Great Britain with the children, leaving the other in their country of origin. There is also a high degree of inter-continental commuting among Africans with permanent residence in the UK; the more successful of whom may retain a second home and possibly a business venture in their country of origin. (Daley, 1996: 52)

Both Wong (2000) and Mazzucato (2005) have studied Ghanaians' transnational practices in detail. Ghanaians have been described as forming part of a diaspora (Henry & Mohan, 2003; Koser, 2003). Indeed, they fulfil the three core elements that are widely understood to constitute a diaspora (Brubaker, 2005): Firstly, Ghanaians are *dispersed* across state borders. There are relatively large Ghanaian communities in many other European countries too such as Germany (Haferkamp, 1989; Haferkamp, 1995), the USA and Canada (Konadu-Agyemang, 1999; Wong, 2000), and in Nigeria (Adepoju, 1995; Unknown author, 2001). Secondly, a large number of Ghanaians abroad have an *orientation to the 'homeland'* as an "authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005: 5), although this may not be the case for all. The third criterion is linked with *boundary-maintenance*, the safeguarding of a distinctive identity in relation to the host society. As Brubaker emphasises, it is this third point that enables one to speak of

a diaphora as a distinctive 'community', held together by a distinctive, active solidarity, as well as by relatively dense social relationships, that cut across state boundaries and link members of the diaspora in different states into a single 'transnational community'. (Brubaker, 2005: 6)

The transnational nature of the Ghanaian community is also apparent in the way in which one of the informants in this study described London:

But London it's just like next door. You know you can come to London and meet everyone here. This is a small place. [HT: Small?] London is a small place, when you think of it. ... Everyone seems to be within the M25, so it's easier to see people around, see other Ghanaians so people feel more comfortable coming down here. ... If you get money in Ghana you can say I go to London I know definite I'm going to have a good time. Because you meet this friend, you meet everyone. It's like an annexe, you get what I mean. Patrick<sup>32</sup> (hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 163

## 2.2.2. Ghanaian ethnic groups or tribes

Various investigations ... have revealed that language, and specifically dialect, plays the most prominent role in defining ethnicity in Ghana. This, to a large extent, explains the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Ghana. (Attah-Poku, 1996: 36)

Bearing in mind the ambiguities linked with ethnic groups or tribes in Ghana (see section 1.1.3), the main ethnic division of Ghanaians in the UK is the Akan (Elam et al., 2000), which is also the largest ethnic group, or tribal confederation, in Ghana, constituting about half of the population<sup>33</sup> (Buah, 1998; Cobbinah, 1990; Nukunya, 1992). The other major ethnic groupings in Ghana are the Mole Dagbani in the north, the Ewe in the east and the Ga-Adangbe in the south east. The national capital Accra is, due to migration and settlement, a melting pot of ethnic groups, but in the older sections of the city indigenous Ga dominate.

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<sup>32</sup> All names of Ghanaian informants are pseudonyms. The selection of pseudonyms reflected the origin of names: i.e. Ghanaians using an English Christian name were given an English name, those with a Ghanaian, or Akan, name were given a Ghanaian name. Two informants with Ewe names were given Ewe names as pseudonyms.

<sup>33</sup> There are about 100 ethnic groups in Ghana (Attah-Poku, 1996).



The Akan comprise a number of tribes, which include the Asante (also called Ashanti), Fanti, Akuapim, Kwahu, Adansi, Akim and Nzema, among others (Buah, 1998; Nukunya, 1992). They speak the same language, also called Akan, with dialectical differences. The Akan, together with the Ewe and the Ga belong to one linguistic family known as Kwa, while the Mole-Dagbani belong to another, Gur. The two main varieties of Akan are Twi and Fanti, which are closely related. Twi is spoken by most of the Akan in the inner parts of the country, including the Ashanti region with Kumasi as the capital city, and Fanti in the coastal regions. There are also four other inter-related dialects which differ significantly from Twi and Fanti, including Nzema and Ahanta (Buah, 1998). Attah-Poku maintains that individual dialects are safeguarded against change. People believe that “tampering with their language means looking down on their culture.” (Attah-Poku, 1996: 40) English is a common language for everyone and is the official language of Ghana.

The three main ethnic groupings of southern Ghana, the Akan, the Ga and the Ewe, each have a distinctive system of kinship, marriage and domestic organisation, with differences existing among the various Akan groups. The Akan belong to a matrilineal system, in which the descent group is traced lineally through the female line<sup>34</sup> (Nukunya, 1992). Traditionally, inheritance and succession pass through the female line too, which means that the sister's son is the beneficiary of a man's property, not his own children. In matrilineal societies it is the mother's brother who performs the functions normally reserved for the father in patrilineal societies. However, paternity remains an essential feature of social life and status. Among the Ashanti, a child of good standing is generally named by his or her father, who is also responsible for the moral life and training

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<sup>34</sup> Partly related to the matrilineal system of the Akan, Ghanaian women in London are considered important people in the community, even though this is not always coupled with the presence of women in high status positions and jobs (Elam et al., 2000).

of the child (Nukunya, 1992). Yet, due to the matrilineal inheritance, children cannot live permanently with their fathers and may never live with them at all, even though residence is ideally patrilocal. Traditionally among the Akan it is consanguines who reside together, not spouses. Matrikin of both sexes live together and children seldom reside throughout childhood with both of their parents (Oppong, 1975).

The Ewe, the Ga, the Adangme and the Krobo are the only through-going patrilineal societies in Ghana (Nukunya, 1992). In a patrilineal system, an individual belongs to his father's descent group, and residence is almost always patrilocal or virilocal.

Community representatives in Elam's et al. (2000) study did not believe that tribal differences were a significant source of division within the British Ghanaian community<sup>35</sup>. The reasons given were political differences straddling different tribal groups; the change of tribal customs already prior to settlement in the UK through colonial influences, inter-marriage, modernisation and legislation; the tendency for Ghanaians to assert their Ghanaian rather than their tribal identity when living abroad; and the belief that tribal differences were less important compared to the benefits of strength in numbers. However, "tribal background could have an impact on culture, *diet*, ceremonies and philosophy and community languages spoken." (Elam et al., 2000: 23, emphasis added)

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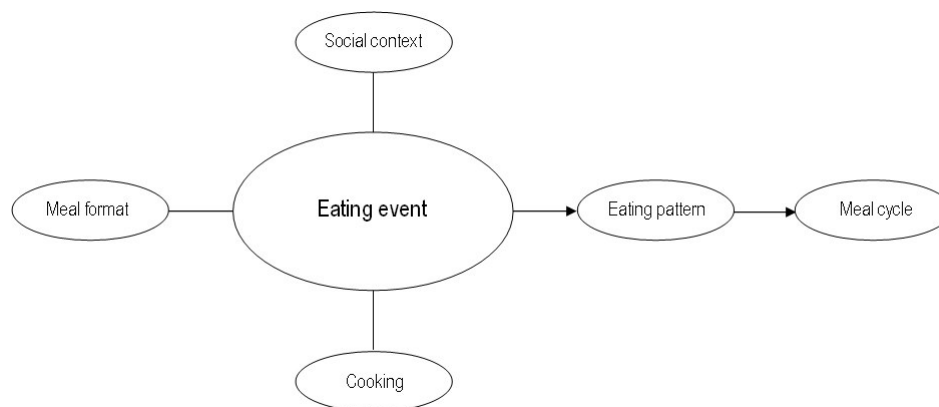
<sup>35</sup> The importance of tribes is nevertheless evident in the number of associations in London based on tribal background, frequently listed in the 'Ghana Review International' magazine. Attah-Poku's study in the USA also highlights the importance of Ghanaian ethnic associations for Ghanaians in America: they play "a very constructive socio-cultural role in the survival and adjustment process of immigrants, as well as help in development programs back home." (Attah-Poku, 1996: 127)



### **2.3. Conceptual models guiding data collection**

One of the main objectives of this study was to examine food habits of Ghanaian migrants and their offspring and to compare their habits with past practices in Ghana. Instead of concentrating on food items, the focus of a number of nutritionally and anthropologically oriented studies, I applied a structuralist approach in order to understand the processes of maintenance and change of food habits. The research was based on the presumption that food and eating are products of culture and that a distinctive food culture reflects the surrounding culture in general (Douglas, 1972; Mäkelä, 2001). Furthermore, the distinct cultural patterning of migrant and ethnic minority foodways enables their examination despite the sharing of the same resources as the host population (Douglas, 1984b).

Due to the foreign or unfamiliar cultural context, a conceptual framework was needed that would catch the degree of structure of various aspects of eating, without assuming particular structures and practices. Hence, I developed the 'eating system' framework (see Figure 2.1) to embrace the complexity of eating and to capture the various levels in which change in food habits and food behaviour can actually take place. The model is an amalgamation of various previous conceptualisations of eating practices, mainly based on qualitative and theoretical research on Western meals and eating (Douglas, 1972; Douglas & Nicod, 1974; Goode et al., 1984b; Mäkelä, 1993; Mäkelä, 1994; Mäkelä, 2001; Murcott, 1982; Murcott, 1983; Whitehead, 1984). However, it has also been influenced by the analysis of research and writing on African food habits (Dei, 1991; Goody, 1982; Spittler, 1993; Tripp, 1992).



**Figure 2.1.** The eating system framework.

The eating event in the centre of the model is defined and influenced by the various spheres of the system which are affected by group-shared rules and regulations. The eating event in the centre of the framework can be either a meal or a snack. This eating event is defined or influenced by three different spheres: meal format, social organisation of eating (social context), and social organisation of food preparation (cooking). When *time* is added to the system, then two additional spheres evolve: eating pattern and meal cycle. While the 'horizontal' spheres of the system are all linked with structural issues related to food and eating; the 'vertical' spheres deal with social aspects of food preparation and consumption.

Clarifying the terms further, **meal format** refers to the content and structure of the main course and to the sequence of the whole meal. The meal format also considers the characteristics of the various food items that constitute a meal, such as texture, colour and taste. The **social context, or social organisation of eating**, takes three aspects into consideration: location of eating (*where*, e.g. home vs. outside; at table vs. in front of TV), company (*with whom*), and way of eating (*with fingers or cutlery*). The latter aspect is significant when researching African or other non-Western food cultures in which meals are usually eaten

without cutlery or utensils. The sphere of **cooking, or social organisation of food preparation**, examines *what* the substance of the activity is (i.e. basic food preparation rules), *who* carries out the activity (participation), and *when* the activity is carried out (time and routine). **Eating pattern** refers to the patterning of eating (i.e. the variation of meals and snacks) over the course of a day, and **meal cycle** to the variation of meal format and meal pattern over a longer period of time. In the study, focus was on the weekday versus weekend variation of eating, and on festive food (Christmas).

The eating system framework is very similar to the one developed for a recent collaborative study carried out in Scandinavia (both share similar names) (Kjaernes, 2001b), but through the inclusion of the concept of meal cycle, this one is better suited for analysing the variation of eating over time<sup>36</sup>. As with the Nordic model, each of the spheres (or 'dimensions') could be explored separately, but as part of the model, each sphere has a different perspective to offer. Together the spheres describe the content or format and the schedule of eating over the course of a day, the location and social context of eating, the social organisation of cooking, and the variation of eating over time.

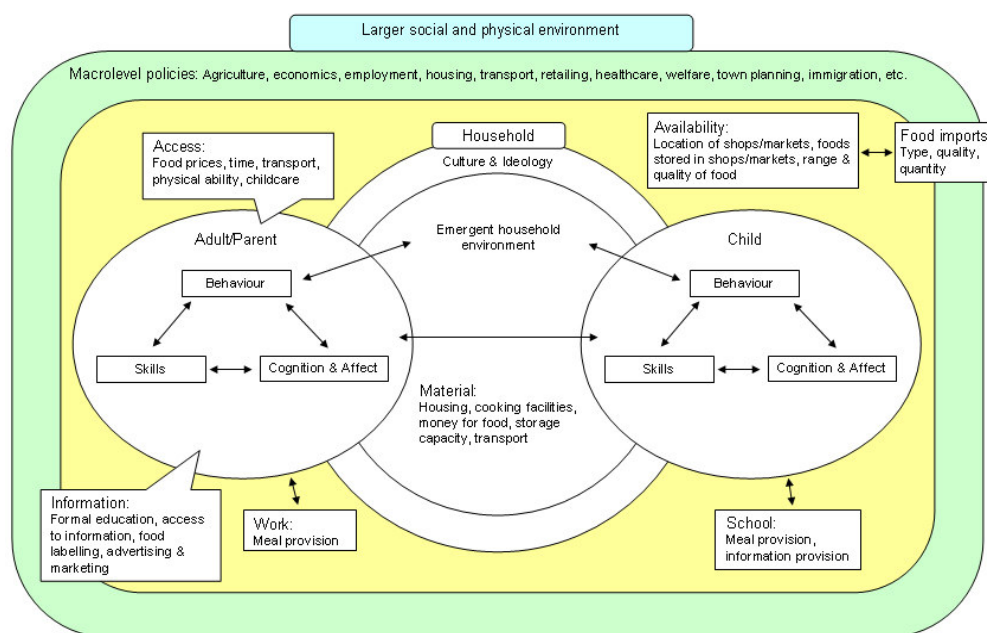
The causal web of why particular foods and meals are eaten in different contexts is very complex, and the eating system framework, by concentrating on sociocultural factors – many of which are linked with identity – reveals only part of the picture. Consequently, although the main focus of the research was at the micro-level, it was situated in a much broader societal, economic and geographical, as well as historical context. Due to the migration context, I was especially interested in the impact of the availability of and access to food familiar to the migrants, as well as shopping practices. As Baranowski explains,

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<sup>36</sup> The Nordic study focused on a one 24-hour period of eating (Kjaernes et al., 2001).

eating at home entails a chain of events that begins with the availability of food in a neighborhood, progresses through a selection of a grocery store, selection of food in the store, availability in the home, preparation of the dish, and distribution in the family, and ends with selection and consumption at the table. (Baranowski, 1997:186)

I was also interested in other structural issues related to the overall organisation in society and to the household. In order to capture some of these issues, I designed another model called the 'Food availability, access and selection' framework (see Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2.2.** Food availability, access and selection framework.

The framework includes the model of family reciprocal determinism<sup>37</sup> which shows that the family or household unit, as well as each of the actors (parent and child), act within a broader social environment (Baranowski, 1997). It also incorporates Williams' and Dowler's framework of various determinants that

<sup>37</sup> Reciprocal determinism is a key construct in social cognitive theory, which has been proposed as a conceptual framework for organising and understanding the literature on family-related effects on health behaviour (Baranowski, 1997).

contribute to the final act of consuming food by individuals (Nutrition Task Force. Low Income Project Team, 1996).

Apart from broader structural issues, the framework highlights the cultural and ideological background of the household, which is particularly relevant when studying migrant and ethnic minority communities. Issues of interest are social customs and norms about proper eating patterns or rhythms and proper meal formats, how meals or eating should be organised socially and spatially, and who should do the cooking. In effect these are all issues covered by the eating system framework, which can naturally be applied in studying not only *actual* but also *ideal* eating events.

Finally, since the eating system framework can be used to collect data on *current* as well as *past* practices, the study was also contextualized historically, largely by analyzing memories related to food and eating prior to migration, and in the early years after migration, and also through the use of relevant published material.

## 2.4. Fieldwork

To obtain data within the Ghanaian community in London I carried out ethnographic fieldwork using various data collection techniques<sup>38</sup> (Fetterman, 1998; Grills, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Jerome & Pelto, 1981; Murcott, 1985). Due to the broad aims of the research, I gathered information in various settings: Ghanaian households, Ghanaian shops and restaurants, and through attending Ghanaian functions. Since I conducted the research single-handedly, and had limited resources, the first setting was the main focus of the study. I have already argued why qualitative research is the best approach when investigating an unfamiliar food culture with restricted resources (section 1.1.1).

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<sup>38</sup> The ethics committee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine approved the study proposal.

I believe that as a non-Ghanaian ‘migrant’ I was well suited to investigate the intricacies of Ghanaian food culture. I was able to ask the whys and wherefores of matters quite obvious to Ghanaians and they were willing to explain things in a fair amount of detail. Although I had basic knowledge of Ghanaian food gained through previous research, I still felt like a novice, especially in the new environment. My white skin and inability to speak any of the Ghanaian languages fluently would certainly hinder research into some other topic areas, e.g. private health care matters, however, I believe that they didn’t impose a great impediment to this study. Although eating is ultimately a very personal act, I think many people, especially Ghanaians, don’t perceive it to be such an intimate thing, rather, it is something shared.

I hoped that by being a migrant myself, with roots in Finland, and by having been to Ghana, trust would be easier to build. Although this background helped a lot, I confronted mistrust and suspicion at various stages of the fieldwork. In fact, certain avenues of inquiry ended up being very difficult to pursue. One of them was related to the production of *kenkey*, a typical Ghanaian staple, for sale in London. Although many people knew Ghanaians, who were earning a living by making *kenkey*, I wasn’t able to gain access to these households.

I spent quite a lot of time with Ghanaians during my first few years in London prior to conducting the actual fieldwork and was able to observe their way of life and eating habits, both in their homes and at functions<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, in autumn 1996 I attended a Twi course which lasted three terms. Later on, prior to the fieldwork in February-March 1999, I took some further Twi lessons privately to brush up my basic knowledge of the language that I had acquired earlier.

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<sup>39</sup> I involved only one person whom I knew at this stage in the study. He later on introduced me to two households that became part of the research.

The actual fieldwork took place over a period of ten months: five months in 1999 - from mid March to mid August - and another five in 2001 - from mid January to mid June. The interruption of fieldwork was related to work commitments in Finland.

#### **2.4.1. Recruiting informants and accessing households**

I had resided nearly four years in London by the beginning of the fieldwork. In this time period I had moved house five times, each time to a different neighbourhood or borough. This helped me gain a sense of the diversity of areas and the mixture of people within the metropolis. I knew that Ghanaians were very widely spread in the city. Since Ghanaians were not highly concentrated in just a few boroughs of Greater London, like some other migrant or ethnic minority groups, I decided not to restrict the recruitment area, but considered the entire metropolis as the study site.

As no one knows the size or composition of the Ghanaian community in the city or in the country as a whole, I knew it was impossible to obtain a representative sample of households (see Lipson & Meleis, 1989). Instead, my objective was to obtain a series of cases through purposive sampling – approximately 15 households – that reflected different types of Ghanaian households in the city. I hoped to recruit households varying in ethnic or tribal background; size and composition (i.e. with or without children; single-parent and two-parent families); length of stay in Britain; socioeconomic status; and migration status. Since I assumed households to be sites of multiple consumption practices, the idea was to involve all members of the households in the study, i.e. both former migrants and their descendants; women and men. I was interested in speaking to Ghanaians at different stages of their life cycle and living in varying circumstances.

The first Twi course I attended not only gave me a basic knowledge of the language but also valuable contacts to whom I turned when I began to negotiate my way into the community in spring 1999. The idea was to access the Ghanaian community first via a few 'gatekeepers' and then get new contacts to introduce me to other possible participants. These are snowball sampling tactics based on utilising social networks of individuals (Arber, 1993). From previous experience, I knew this was the best way, and I had been informed that I would find it difficult to recruit people without personal introductions.

In the first phase of the research a few other key informants helped me get started too – a personal Ghanaian acquaintance, my second Twi teacher, and a Ghanaian student in food sciences. As I became more engaged in the field, I met Ghanaians at various functions and venues, and at a Ghanaian church I attended a few times, and was able to involve some of them in the study.

I introduced myself to new Ghanaians as a PhD student who was interested in Ghanaian food culture and in the way in which food habits develop after migrating to a new country. I normally explained that I had been to Ghana where I had lived in Ghanaian families and that I had already learnt something from a small-scale study in the past, through which I had made good friends. I also told them that I was originally from Finland and that I had recently migrated to London from Germany where I had previously lived for a number of years. I also explained that I worked part-time which meant that I could only conduct research on certain days, or only in the evenings on the days I worked.

The strategy of using personal introductions meant that generally by the time I approached new contacts, they already knew something about the study and were willing to talk to me. In other words, earlier contacts selected acquaintances, whom they knew would have time for the study. The introduction generally occurred over the phone, i.e. earlier contacts called their friends to ask



them if they were interested. If yes, then it was up to me to get in touch with them. A couple of times I was just given a name and a number without any introduction and, unsurprisingly, on these occasions failed to recruit new contacts into the study. Furthermore, not all people I approached face-to-face – even after an introduction of some format – took part or were able to invest as much time as I would have liked in the study.

In the second phase of fieldwork, I used a different strategy in entering the community. I attended a meeting of a Ghanaian women's group where I was able to publicise the study. A few of the women were very sympathetic towards the research and, apart from providing valuable information, helped me later by putting me in touch with other Ghanaians. For example, two of them invited me along to meetings of some other associations where I was able to recruit new contacts into the study.

The reason for not going back to my earlier contacts was that I wanted to gain a broader and more varied sample of contacts in regard to ethnicity (or tribe) and location in London. During the first phase of the research most of my informants were Akan, mainly Fanti, and many of them lived in northwest London, with only a few living in other parts of the city. I had already asked them to put me in touch with friends or acquaintances.

Finally, I had different kinds of informants or '**contacts**'. My main contacts consisted of people who were willing to give more of their time to the study, to talk about their past and present food habits, and in most cases to involve other members of their family in the study as well. These became my '**households**'. People who didn't have so much time available, but with whom I was able to talk about issues of interest were '**informants**'. Ghanaians who provided valuable information about the community and cultural practices, whom I saw more often

than once, became my '**key informants**'. People who only supplied me with new contacts but no information were '**links**'.

Eight '**key informants**' provided mainly general information about Ghanaian (food) culture or the Ghanaian community in London. I met six of these several times and they all put me in touch with further contacts. Two of the eight were representatives of Ghanaian organisations but others possessed valuable knowledge through other means, some through high levels of education. One key informant was not highly educated, but was able and willing to provide me with insight into the sensitive nature of Ghanaian migration and into the harsh reality of everyday life in London. Key informants generally viewed the study in a very positive light, and many bestowed on me copious amounts of wisdom and insight.

Unlike interviews with the households that always took place in their homes, sessions with key informants generally took place in other locations, e.g. cafés or my office at the University. In some instances the sessions were tape-recorded, but in others I wrote notes during the meeting or soon afterwards.

Only a few of the sessions with the 16 '**informants**' were tape-recorded and generally I wrote fieldnotes *after* the sessions. In other words, information collection was not always so obvious to the informants. They were Ghanaians whom I had met at functions or some other events, or then they were introduced to me by existing contacts. More often than not, I visited them in their homes, and apart from a few exceptions, visited them only once. The sessions consisted more of participant observation and casual conversation than planned data collection.

I have summarised the type and number of contacts I made during the fieldwork in Table 2.3. This excludes information on stores and restaurants, which is presented subsequently.

**Table 2.3.** Overview of contacts in the field.

Type of contact	No.	Clarification
Household	18	Food habits of all members within household of interest; data collected in a more systematic manner; usually repeated sessions with the main informant.
Key informant	8	Provided mainly general information about Ghanaian (food) culture or Ghanaian community in London (but possibly also personal information) and in some cases contacts; generally several sessions.
Informant	16	Provided personal and/or general information.
Link	6	Main function providing contacts, i.e. not information.

My basic knowledge of Twi proved to be useful in ‘breaking the ice’ in the field. Many Ghanaians were amused to hear me greeting them in their own language. One informant whose English wasn’t very good at all mixed a lot of Twi into it, especially when talking about different foods. As I had made a point of learning culinary terms, I was able to understand and communicate with her. I never became fluent in the language. Most of my other Ghanaian contacts had a good knowledge of English, some having very eloquent ways of expressing themselves.

#### **2.4.2. Data collection in households**

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I visited the households first to introduce myself and to explain the study, but didn’t attempt any serious data collection. It gave people a chance to reflect on the study and to decline if they didn’t want to take part after all. I modified this practice later as many Ghanaians appeared to be quite happy to be interviewed without having met me before.

I didn’t pursue written consent from participants, as this might have hampered the recruitment procedure. Lipson and Meleis (1989), and Hennings et al. (1996) have discussed the problem of obtaining written consent for participation from migrants. I had also been warned that this could cause difficulties, as many

Ghanaians are reluctant to fill in official forms and papers. Therefore, after explaining details of the research and about the confidentiality of all the information, I only sought verbal consent. I also handed out an information sheet about the study with my contact details and a logo of the university<sup>40</sup>.

Before entering the field, I had visualized spending a lot of time conducting lengthy sessions of participant observation in households. I soon changed my approach after realising that this was unsuitable for most of them. Those who were working during the week were often equally active at weekends, one informant claiming that Sunday was the busiest day in the week in their family. It was a day for church and various choir rehearsals, which the children attended. Due to the busy schedules of many informants, I modified my approach so that more emphasis was placed on repeated in-depth interviews. Most of my main informants were willing to see me more than once – at a time convenient for them. I had placed emphasis on the latter aspect, even if it meant numerous late evening or weekend appointments for me. Some could see me also in the daytime during the week, which generally reflected the nature of their work. There were a few nurses doing shift work and a couple of mothers who were child-minders working from home. One lady was recuperating from an operation, another was still at home with small children of her own.

Fieldwork carried out in the households consisted mainly of casual conversation and tape-recorded interviews, and in some cases it included observation of cooking and eating practices. On many occasions I was offered food to eat and a few times I joined in family celebrations. One family took me along to a

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<sup>40</sup> All along though, I had a feeling that the information sheet was futile: many only glanced at it and didn't bother to read through it properly. The wording of the information sheet was perhaps too dry and official. Or, maybe this was just another example of the importance of oral communication in Ghanaian culture. In some instances, I even got the impression that the information sheet put some people off from taking part. The two cases I can think of were at first quite positive towards the study. I went to visit them and explained about the study face-to-face. Before leaving I brought out the information sheet for them to read, and it was afterwards that I noticed that they had changed their attitude.

confirmation party of their friend's daughter. Nevertheless, contact with households wasn't as intense as I had originally envisaged. The in-depth nature of many of the interviews made up for this to a certain extent, and in most households I was able to interview more than just one family member.

The idea of involving all members of the household was part of the study design, as already indicated in previous sections. This too turned out to be a trickier task than originally anticipated. In most households, the first point of contact was the female head of the family. Since she was the main homemaker and provider of food, she was the best person to talk to anyhow. Recruiting men within the households ended up being a much more difficult a task. Many families lacked a male household head. In a few two-parent families, the father wasn't present. In one household, he had gone back home for his mother's funeral, and according to his wife, was going to return any time. He didn't return at all during the second fieldwork phase (as apparently he had become engaged in some sort of business in Ghana or was overseeing the building of a house.) His absence affected the amount of time his wife was able to dedicate to the study. With four children, a child-minding job and eventually a part-time course to cope with, she could only manage two brief sessions in the end.

In another family, a two-parent household turned out to be a single-parent household. I managed to speak to the father briefly during the first interview session, but when I subsequently went back I learnt that he didn't actually live there. In a third family, the father worked and lived most of the year in Ghana, and came over to the UK to see his wife and two sons only during his holiday, and this didn't necessarily occur every year.

In two households, where men were actually present – albeit absent during my visits – their wives were 'protective', claiming that they were too busy to take part.

In both cases, I didn't persist with my wish to speak to the husband, as I didn't want to endanger my rapport with the wife.

I wasn't able to involve all children either, although on the whole the number of children I saw and spoke to was relatively high. In one household, the youngest child of the family was living with relatives in Ghana. In a few households, the mother indicated that the children were too busy with schoolwork and hobbies to take part. This was especially the case with boys in their late teens. All sessions with children ended up being one-off, although I would have liked to question a few youngsters again.

Despite the frequent problem of rescheduling appointments and cancellations, some of the main informants were very generous with their time and I was able to see them on several occasions. For example, in one household, I had four sessions with the mother, including one cooking demonstration, two sessions with the father, and also a short session with their three children. I was able to interview altogether six main informants three times (i.e. tape-recorded sessions), and eight people twice.

In the second period of data collection, I didn't attempt a second or third session unless I was certain that the person had the time to spare. I gave up my ambitious goal to obtain 'complete datasets' for all households, i.e. to acquire information from the past and present from all household members. I started to view the pool of data as more fluid, containing various amounts of information per household. Due to this approach, the final number of 'households' increased to 18. The total number of people involved in the study who were part of these households was 47 (see Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4.** Number and gender of individuals involved in the study as part of households.

<b>Individuals within households (n = 18)</b>	
Total number of people involved within households	47
Women	18
Men	6
Children*	23
Girls	17
Boys	6

\* Children: living at home with parents, age 2-23

### *In-depth interviews*

I interviewed most of the female household heads on their own; in only two cases did I conduct joint sessions with husband and wife. I was able to interview two male household heads separately from their wives. In a household comprising two siblings, I had joint sessions as well. With regard to children, most sessions were joint or group sessions, although I was able to interview a few older ones on their own. In some of the interviews involving younger children, the mother was present too.

In the case of migrants, I was interested in both their past and the present food habits and practices. In the case of children born in the UK, I focused more on the present, although the older participants were able to tell me about times when they were younger. If I was able to conduct repeated sessions, the first session typically dealt with the past, on memories of food and eating in Ghana. Subsequent sessions focused on early years in London and present day practices.

Characteristically, a session dealing with the past started with a typical day when still living in Ghana. I generally asked the informants to focus on the time before migrating to the UK, but many preferred to go further back in time, to primary and secondary school days, hence highlighting how habits and practices had evolved

already in Ghana. I asked the informant to describe the eating events of a usual day (i.e. eating pattern) and then queried the different spheres of the eating system related to the events, i.e. about the structure of meals, cooking practices, way of eating, and social and spatial aspects of eating. This was followed by variation of eating over time, i.e. issues related to the meal cycle. In many cases, the discussion flowed naturally from one topic to the other, without me having to prompt too much. Joint sessions were generally very dynamic and I often retreated to 'back stage' allowing the participants to reminisce with each other.

A session dealing with the present usually started with a qualitative 24-hour recall of the various eating events, and of food and drink consumed. This was followed by a discussion whether it was a typical day and what would a typical week be like. If I was able to conduct repeat sessions I tried to obtain a 24-hour recall each time.

Since I was interested in the development of Ghanaian food supply in London, I also asked about the availability of familiar food on their arrival in the city. Other areas of discussion included shopping practices; food preferences and food dislikes; ideas of a proper meal; views on healthy and unhealthy food or eating; eating out; and decision making in regard to food and eating in the family.

The age of the UK-born descendants had an impact on the type of questions I posed them. In regard to younger participants (approximately <12 years of age), apart from a 24-hour dietary recall, I queried their food preferences and dislikes; food at school; what they perceived as typical Ghanaian and English food; and healthy/unhealthy food and eating practices. The questioning of older respondents resembled that of the adults but was quite flexible, so that they were able to voice more of their concerns in regard to food and eating.



Most interviews carried on for one to three hours. Sessions with younger children were generally much shorter.

### **2.4.3. Functions**

Many Ghanaians in London who can afford it celebrate various rites of passage, such as 'outdooring' of babies<sup>41</sup>, christenings, weddings, birthdays, and funerals on a large scale at local halls or community centres, invitations going out far beyond their own extended family. Functions generally take place on Saturdays, especially funerals, which form an important part of life among the Akans. Ghanaians believe that the soul remains among the living after death and that the ancestors participate in life (Cobbinah, 1990). The passing away of each person is therefore marked by a special occasion, and it is usual to attend funerals or memorial services<sup>42</sup> even if one has not known the dead person. Furthermore, Ghanaians form mutual aid and benevolent societies, combining assistance with sociability (Attah-Poku, 1996).

I had attended a number of Ghanaian functions already prior to the fieldwork. During the actual fieldwork, I went to a few more, mainly through the invitations of study participants. Data collection occurred through participant observation and informal discussions.

### **2.4.4. Approaching stores selling Ghanaian food**

The fieldwork also included data collection in Ghanaian food stores and restaurants. Table 2.5 summarises the numbers of Ghanaian stores and restaurants in the city and those approached and involved in the study.

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<sup>41</sup> A ceremony involving the practice of formally presenting a newborn child to the gods, society at large and dead ancestors. It usually takes place on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after birth (Cobbinah, 1990: 76).

<sup>42</sup> Memorial services are arranged in London also for dead relatives in Ghana.

**Table 2.5.** Ghanaian food stores and restaurants involved in the study.

	<b>Shops</b>	<b>Restaurants</b>
Total in London	>30	18?
Visited	17	6
Approached for study purpose	12	6
Data collection	6	5

The main reason for collecting data on Ghanaian shops was to provide background information for the study, i.e. not to present an all inclusive review of Ghanaian shops in the metropolis, nor to conduct extensive fieldwork in them.

I visited most of the stores frequented by my informants, as I wanted to know what access they had to Ghanaian food. I chatted to some of the shopkeepers about food items and sometimes referred to my study. Many were charmed when they realised that I knew about Ghanaian dishes and had been to Ghana, but became cautious when I mentioned the word 'research'. One shopkeeper indicated that I should have a list of questions ready so that they could clearly see what information I needed. As I got the feeling that other shopkeepers would prefer this approach as well, I decided to construct a questionnaire.

The idea of the short questionnaire was to gain some basic information about the shops, shopkeepers, customers and food products (see Appendix A). The questions were quite straightforward and in my opinion harmless. I hoped that they would result in some more general discussion and that I could pursue interesting leads. Hence, I aimed at collecting information face-to-face, but designed the questionnaire so that shopkeepers could fill it in by themselves if required. An information sheet indicated that any information provided would be treated in strict confidence.

Although I visited at least 17 shops or market stalls over the whole period of the fieldwork – normally ending up buying some Ghanaian foodstuffs to try at home –

I didn't pursue the questionnaire in all of them. The magazine Ghana Review International (GRI) regularly contains small advertisements of shops selling Ghanaian goods. (Most Ghanaian shops are not listed in the Yellow Pages.) I contacted eight shops advertised in the magazine, selecting ones in different areas and ones I knew that had been around for sometime. I also approached a few shops or market stalls not advertised in the magazine.

To avoid travelling to the stores in vain, I telephoned most of them first to check whether the shopkeeper was willing to see me to answer a few questions in regard to the study. I was aware that the proprietor might not be present, and that shop assistants may be reluctant to be interviewed. Indeed, many proprietors were absent when I first telephoned the shops, two being in Ghana at the time. Two indicated that they didn't have the time to see me because of all the work involved in running the shop. However, they were both willing to have a look at the questionnaire, which I sent to them including a pre-paid envelope. They did not return them.

In the end, I was able to go through the questionnaire with six different shopkeepers, five of whom had agreed to see me over the phone. I received one further questionnaire through the post from a shopkeeper who didn't have the time to go through it with me while I was there. Three proprietors were particularly helpful and engaged in a lengthy discussion after we had gone through the main points. The others were suspicious to a varying degree and less helpful.

During this phase of the fieldwork, I was in fact confronted with a lot of suspicion and mistrust. I became aware of the real reason only after one very unsuccessful day in the field, when three Ghanaian market stall owners had turned me down. None of them wanted to speak to me, as they weren't certain of my intentions. One even refused to listen to what the study was about, and then spilled the

beans by asking hadn't I read the papers. Since I was puzzled, he hinted at the court case of two shopkeepers who had been caught selling illegal "bushmeat".

An undercover reporter had revealed that two Nigerian shopkeepers trading at a market in east London had smuggled endangered species into Britain for under the counter sale as bushmeat<sup>43</sup>. A monkey was allegedly sold for £350 to the reporter who told the shopkeepers that "he was the heir to a tribal throne and wanted to cook a traditional meal for his uncle, who was a tribal chief." (Jeevan Vasagar in the Guardian, May 15, 2001)

Their operation in east London offered protected tantalus monkeys and giant scaly anteaters as part of an exotic menu of jungle dishes. Whole lions at £5000 each, antelopes, porcupines, goats, cane rats and large, live snails – all from the wilds of West Africa – were also candidates for the dinner table. (The Guardian, June 16, 2001)

This was the first bushmeat case to come before an English court. According to the Guardian, "the jury was shown a covert video shot by the journalist of a smoked mammal being picked out of a freezer in the defendant's shop." (Jeevan Vasagar in the Guardian, May 15, 2001) The couple were found guilty in June 2001 and jailed for four months (the Guardian, June 16, 2001).

I hadn't expected the fieldwork in the shops to be easy, as I had heard that Ghanaian shopkeepers were wary of environmental health officers. The amount of hostility I confronted was more than I had originally anticipated. However, inadvertently, I ended up collecting data at the height of the foot and mouth crisis in the UK, with officials and the public showing increased interest into animal and meat imports. Combined with the above story, the point in time for conducting fieldwork in the shops was the worst imaginable.

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<sup>43</sup> "Bushmeat is the given term used for any animal that is eaten as food and comes from the African forest, in this case the Nigerian forest. You will hear about porcupine and deer and grasscutter, which is a type of rodent." These are words of the prosecuting counsel, reported by Jeevan Vasagar in the Guardian, 15 May, 2001.

### **2.4.5. Fieldwork in restaurants**

The reason for including restaurants in the research was to analyse the availability of Ghanaian food in the community and to assess the types of meals served within them, as well as the difference between food in the domestic and public spheres in terms of gendered preparation, content and consumption.

Ghana Review International also carries advertisements of Ghanaian restaurants or restaurants providing Ghanaian food. My choice of restaurants was influenced partly by a special issue of the magazine containing articles on “Ghanaian drink, dine and dance venues in Britain” (Issue No. 072, May 2000). It included a list of venues, including their date of establishment and rough location in London (north, south, east and west). I decided to select at least one in each area and also go for ones that had been open the longest. Out of a total of 18 venues in the list, I approached six, three in the north, and one in the south, west and east.

All restaurateurs or managers agreed to see me. However, it took a lot of effort to actually meet them, as most appointments were rescheduled several times. In the end, data collection took place in five venues. I gave up on the sixth place, after the female restaurateur failed to turn up three times. I did not speak to any of the customers.

Data collection in the restaurants consisted mainly of interviews with the managers who were all male even though in some restaurants they shared the task with their wife. I didn't use a tape-recorder as most restaurateurs preferred me to take notes. The topics of discussion included ones related to the establishment of the venue, customers, dishes served, procurement of foods, and gendered division of labour (see Appendix B for list of themes for restaurateurs).

In two restaurants I was able to see what was going on in the kitchen. In one venue I spent two evenings observing the food preparation and other activities, and helped with some chores as well.

In most places I tried something on the menu, to remind myself of the taste and consistency of some of the more typically Ghanaian dishes.

#### **2.4.6. Other material**

Throughout the fieldwork period, I collected any relevant printed or published material to supplement information obtained from study participants. These included articles from the Ghana Review International magazine<sup>44</sup>, Amanie (magazine of the Ghana Union London) and Roots (another Ghanaian magazine); newspaper articles on Ghanaians in Britain; reports on Ghanaian overseas migration; and material from the Internet. I also searched for relevant research carried out in Ghana.

Additionally, I was in touch with the Food Standards Agency to find out more about food imports from Ghana. I contacted the Ghana High Commission and a Ghanaian welfare organisation to find out more about Ghanaians in London.

The following table is a summary of the different types of information collected for the study, as well as the main sources of information.

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<sup>44</sup> Ghana Review Interantional (GRI) is a full colour news magazine published monthly. Its main markets are the UK, the USA, Ghana and Continental Europe.

**Table 2.6.** Types of information collected.

Information	Sources of information
<b>Current food behaviour of Ghanaians</b> , e.g. habits re: meal system framework, shopping habits	Informants in households, functions, observation
<b>Past food behaviour of Ghanaians</b> , e.g. pre-migration habits re: meal system framework, early years in London	Main informants in households, secondary literature
<b>Availability of Ghanaian food in London – past and present</b> , e.g. typical Ghanaian food, location of shops, change in availability	Shop keepers, observation, main informants, key informants, GRI
<b>Ghanaian restaurants in London</b> , e.g. number and location of restaurants, year of establishment, main customers, dishes served, gendered division of labour	Restaurant proprietors, observation, GRI
<b>Ghanaian food culture in general</b> , e.g. regional variation in Ghana, preparation of dishes, seasonal variation of foodstuffs, customs	Key informants, main informants, functions, observation, previous research in Ghana, cookbooks, internet, grey literature.
<b>Ghanaian community in London</b> , e.g. reasons for migration and settlement, tribes in London, associations, societies and churches	Key informants, literature, grey literature, newspapers, GRI, other Ghanaian magazines, internet

## 2.5. Documentation of information: tapes, fieldnotes and database

In-depth interviews with the main informants in the households as well as most key informants were tape-recorded. The total number of tape-recorded sessions was 64. Most of the informants were quite relaxed about the recording. Before going back for a subsequent interview, I went through the tape/s of the previous session summarising the main points. If I had the time, I transcribed them. This enabled me to analyse the interview and to plan the following session. Table 2.7 shows how many informants took part in repeated sessions.

**Table 2.7.** Participation in tape-recorded sessions. Number of informants attending sessions.

How many informants took part in		
1 session	38	i.e. 38 informants interviewed only once, some of these being group sessions
2 sessions	8	
3 sessions	6	
4 sessions	1	
>5 sessions	1	

I also wrote fieldnotes throughout the fieldwork: after each session with any of the informants and after any events occurring in the field. Due to the tight schedule, with data collection often not ending until late in the evenings or at night, writing fieldnotes was not always an easy task.

From the beginning of the fieldwork, I started building up a database of all the contacts I made in the field<sup>45</sup>. At first the database included all basic data about the individuals, such as type of contact, contact details, meeting dates, and who referred me to them. As the fieldwork advanced and I obtained more information about the individuals, I recorded their ethnicity (or tribe), age (sometimes only approximate), year of arrival to the UK, and other useful information. The database proved to be very valuable when analysing the study population, as it gave a quick overview of what kind of people were involved.

## 2.6. Analysis of data

The analysis of data was an ongoing iterative process, although the bulk of the analysis did not take place until the end of data collection. A large number of the tapes from interviews with the main informants were transcribed verbatim. Approximately 10 interviews were transcribed by an experienced secretary. I checked the transcripts for errors and missing data. Some of the very lengthy

<sup>45</sup> I used Microsoft Access to build up the database.



interviews I transcribed verbatim only partially, summarising sections that seemed marginal to my concerns.

I chose the computer software QSR NVivo to help analyse the interview transcripts. The other material collected during fieldwork was included in the analysis but this occurred without the help of NVivo, although it was organised around the identified themes.

In NVivo, concepts, ideas or categories are coded or stored in 'nodes' which can be organised into logical 'trees' for shaping the data (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). Tree nodes can be hierarchically structured with categories and any number of subcategories. Information about individuals or cases is stored in 'attributes' of codes or documents, and observations, reflections and ideas can be recorded in 'memos'. Cases, documents and nodes can be organised into 'sets'. NVivo's tools allow searching for data within the nodes, sets and memos with the help of attributes and other search criteria, which can assist the interpretation of the data and the refining of the analysis and concepts.

I used NVivo as a tool to organise the data into manageable segments for comparative analysis. Interviews were coded thematically, partly according to the predefined topics, as in the eating system framework (i.e. a node for each of the spheres of the framework and sub-nodes for all eating events), and partly according to new evolving themes. I applied all the abovementioned features of NVivo to manage the data and created a database with a total of 93 documents (64 transcripts and 29 memos) and 250 nodes (211 tree nodes). These figures exclude the nodes that were formed when the data was searched. The large number of nodes can be explained by the fact that nodes were created also for all foodstuffs and dishes mentioned (86 nodes in total), which enabled the comparison of minute details on concepts or ideas about foods, recipes and combination rules. These sub-nodes came under the node 'food preparation' in

the meal system framework (e.g. meal system framework/food preparation/dishes & combination rules/soups/groundnut soup). Otherwise node structure in NVivo was quite straightforward with the following highlighting the main 'parent' nodes: meal system framework; procurement of food & supply; time; country & location (UK or Ghana); eating settings (incl. Ghanaian restaurants); ethnic group or tribe; migration history; people (background information); attitudes, values, opinions; gender issues.

After the first round of coding, a more detailed analysis of data was based on the material within the codes and occurred largely on paper, or not necessarily in NVivo. Thus, most of the codes in NVivo were lower order descriptive categories, and the higher order categories were identified subsequently, during the processing and writing up of the findings and through the comparison of results obtained from different settings and in different contexts, and also by other researchers. This analytic process continued all the way through to writing the conclusions of the thesis, following some of the basic principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The main themes and theories emerged through the progressive focusing of the research.

To aid the comparative analysis of past and present food habits, I tabularised some of the data, such as information on weekday meal pattern and eating events, weekend eating events, meal cycle (Christmas and other celebrations) and the social context of eating. For example, the table on past weekday food habits included information on the ethnic background of the informant, the time period under consideration, and all the various food or dishes mentioned under the main eating events. A similar table was constructed for current habits.

## **2.7. Characteristics of study population**

Appendix C contains details of the households engaged in the study and some of the other main informants. The following is a summary of the main characteristics of all informants.

### **2.7.1. Patterns of migration and settlement**

The majority of the Ghanaian migrants that became involved in the study had been residing in the UK well over 10 years by the time I met them. A large proportion had been in the country more than 20 years, some more than 30 years and a few over 40 years. Only a very small number of the main informants had been in the country for less than 10 years, none for less than 6 years.

A key informant told me that I would find it difficult to recruit Ghanaians who had been in the country for less than 7-10 years. Apparently this was the time needed to settle properly in the country, with valid documents, or British citizenship. People who had spent less time in the country would worry about my intentions, and prefer not to be questioned, regardless of the topic of the study.

However, during the fieldwork I came across Ghanaians who had lived here less than five years and also some who had been here less than a year. In two cases it was the informant's mother who had come to look after the family's children; in one family it was two teenaged children. In one case, a stepdaughter had recently arrived to continue studies in the UK. Two of the key informants had been here less than 5 years. One was a student and the other was a migrant worker.

The majority of Ghanaians involved in the study had migrated from Ghana to the UK, without having visited the country or any other country previously. Yet there were some exceptions. One of the main informants was actually born in the UK, but had gone to Ghana with her parents as a baby. She had then returned to the

UK in her early 20s. Another had previously been working in Sierra Leone before migrating here. Some of the study participants had visited the UK a few times before settling in the country. One family had been living in Paris for several years before migrating here. One informant had been living and working as a teacher in Nigeria, but with the expulsion of Ghanaian citizens from the country in the early 1980s, had headed for the UK.

Many of the study participants were not forthcoming about the reason for their migration to the UK. Yet, after gentle probing, I was able to acquire this from most of the main informants. Many of the older participants had migrated to obtain further education in the country. Only a few had left Ghana as political refugees. Some had joined their partner or spouse, and many had migrated for better employment opportunities. In some cases migration was an intergenerational phenomenon. For example, in a few instances, informants joined their parents in the UK, or followed their footsteps, if they had already been to the UK and returned to Ghana. In other families, parents came later on, to look after grandchildren. Two siblings had been sent to this country as children to attend boarding schools. When I got to know them, they were adults living together.

Few study participants had a rural background in Ghana. Most had lived in semi-urban or urban areas. Furthermore, very many had lived in various parts of Ghana before migrating to the UK.

### **2.7.2. Ethnic background**

The ethnic or tribal background of the former migrants varied. I spoke to Ashantis, Fantis, Gas, Ewes, Akuapims, Kwahus, Nzimas, Krobos, and an Ada. The majority of contacts belonged to the first four tribes, and a number were of mixed tribal background, e.g half Ashanti, half Ga. The household members belonged to the first five tribes. One was half Fanti, half Lebanese. None of the

contacts were northerners, i.e. belonged to tribes of northern Ghana. Compared with the results of Elam's et al. study (2000), the tribal background of the study population reflects the alleged reality quite well (i.e. Ashantis and Fantis form the majority.)

Most UK-born descendants were of mixed tribal background, although in a few households the parents were from the same tribe. In two households, the father was non-Ghanaian: in one case he was from Barbados, and in another from Sierra Leone. In one household there was a foster child of Caribbean origin. In one of the informants' families, the father was English, in another Nigerian.

### **2.7.3. Household size and composition**

Eight of the 18 households were two-parent, and another eight were single-parent households with a female head (see Table 2.8). In three of the latter households, the partner or husband of the female head was living elsewhere. The number of children varied from one to four, two households having no children.

**Table 2.8.** The size and composition of households (n=18).

<b>Type of household</b>	
Two-parent with children	8
Single-parent (mother) with children	
Father living elsewhere	3
Mother divorced or widowed	5
Households without children	2
Size of household	
1	1
2	6
3	3
4	3
5	2
6	3
Number of children in household	
0	2
1	6
2	5
3	2
4	3

#### 2.7.4. Gender and age

As Table 2.4 presents (p. 98), roughly 65% more women than men and 65% more girls than boys took part in the study as part of the households.

The restaurateurs involved in the study were all male, although females were the main chefs or cooks. Four of the eight shopkeepers interviewed were female.

Three of the eight key informants were female.

The age of the migrants involved in the study varied between 11 and 68. The majority were in their mid 30s and 40s, some were in their 50s and a handful in their 60s. There were also some young adults in their early and mid 20s. Like the 11 year-old, they had arrived in the UK as children.

The age of the UK-born descendants who partook in the study varied, with the youngest being only a couple of years and the oldest 21 years old. Ten children were 10 years or younger, four were between 11-15 and five between 16-21 years.

#### **2.7.5. Distribution in London and housing tenure**

None of the contacts lived in southwest London, but other parts of the metropolis were well represented in the study. Although most contacts lived within 15 kilometres of the city centre (within zones 3-4), a few lived further afield, typically in owner-occupied housing.

The large majority of informants lived in council housing, with five households living on council estates. Some had inhabited their council flat for a great number of years, one as long as 23 years. Many lived in cramped conditions. This did not necessarily reflect their financial situation. For example, in one case, a family of six lived in a relatively small flat on a council estate, although the father owned at least two properties on the outskirts of London, and was in the process of building a house in Ghana. A few families had purchased their dwelling from the local authority having first lived in it as tenants. Only four households had bought their house on the private market. The heads of households in owner-occupied housing had all been in the country for more than 17 years.

The pattern of tenure reflects the results of the 1991 census indicating that the majority of 'Black Africans' in London rent from the public sector (London Research Centre, 2000).

#### **2.7.6. Socioeconomic background**

Due to lack of information on income levels, the criteria for dividing the main informants into different SES groups (higher and lower SES) was according to

the level of education, current occupation and whether families were receiving income support. Information on the latter, sensitive, aspect was obtained by asking whether children qualified for free school lunches or not. For the past, the main criterion was the level of education.

Four of the male household heads who took part in the study had university degrees. They had all obtained degrees in the UK and worked in their professions in this country. Two of them were already retired, but one of them was pursuing a further part-time postgraduate degree at a university. Three young men in their early 20s were currently in college, but also working. One man had no special qualifications.

Some of the male restaurateurs and shop owners had degrees. One male key informant had no qualifications at all; three were in the process of obtaining postgraduate degrees.

A few of the 18 female household heads (one household consisted of two female siblings) involved in the study had no particular qualifications, neither from Ghana nor this country. Several had obtained vocational training either before or after migration. One female household head had migrated to the UK to study nursing. Two others had obtained their nursing degrees already in Ghana. Two further female household heads had obtained degrees in Ghana, and were now in the process of obtaining further qualifications. The two sisters living together had obtained university degrees in the UK and were working in their professions. The younger one was in the process of obtaining a further postgraduate qualification.

Two of the three UK-born descendants who were already in their early 20s had obtained vocational training; the third had a university degree. The three female key informants had all obtained degrees from this country. Overall, the



educational level of Ghanaians was quite good, which is representative of the larger population.

## **2.8. Reflecting on the role and identity as a researcher**

I shared the migration history and aspirations of many Ghanaians in that I had migrated to London (via Germany) to study for a higher degree, but also worked part-time. Consequently, I could identify with many Ghanaians I met during the study, and they could also understand me well. My longstanding friendship with Ghanaians in the past and the ability to speak a few words of Twi, and the use of Ghanaian attires at functions, meant that on many occasions I felt intimately connected to the Ghanaian community, and I believe many Ghanaians saw me in this fashion too. Yet, as a foreigner, it was easier for me to adopt the 'incompetent' position of the 'outsider' person (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). As a Finnish national, I could also at times distance myself from the white majority, if I believed it helped the research process. Some Ghanaians had experienced discrimination in London regarding employment and/or housing, and consequently had developed negative feelings towards the English. Some of the young children viewed me slightly suspiciously, if they were not used to having a white person in their home. Older children were usually very relaxed and open.

The influence of my gender on the research was apparent too. As a woman, it was easier for me to do research on food and cooking in Ghanaian families, as this was the domain of women. For example, John (hhJ) approached me at a meeting held after a church service and indicated that his wife, Caroline, would most likely be interested in taking part. In the end, I met Caroline on four different occasions, although I had one session with John too. The fact that I was of similar age to many informants, was an advantage as well.

There was a shift in my role and identity as a researcher in the two phases of fieldwork. In the first part of the fieldwork, more of my social life was involved with the Ghanaian community. In the second phase, I had married which meant that the fieldwork was a more bounded experience.

## **2.9. Methodological considerations**

There is no means of estimating how representative the study participants were of Ghanaians in general in London. The study population was biased towards Ghanaians who had lived in Britain for a long time, had a permanent residence permit, or were, in fact, British. Furthermore, the sample didn't include current refugees, northerners, people with a very high or low SES, or those with several jobs and very lengthy working hours. According to several informants, a large proportion of Ghanaians in London fit the last category.

Despite the above limitations, I believe that those who partook in the study were quite typical members of the wider Ghanaian community in London. There is a possibility that partaking Ghanaians had a greater interest in food and cooking than those who refused to participate. On a few occasions I was introduced to people who apparently were very good cooks. When I asked for further contacts, some people tried to think of Ghanaians who liked cooking and were good at it. Considering the objectives of the study, I didn't think this was a problem. I used several key informants of varying backgrounds to gain access to the community and this led in the end to a good mix of participants.

At first glance, the number of single-parent households appeared to be relatively high. However, it didn't seem to be such an unusual phenomenon. Community representatives in Elam and colleagues' (2000) study recognised the increase in single parents in London, although they didn't believe this was typical of family

life in Africa. Yet, it may be so in some settings in Ghana. A study carried out in a multi-ethnic residential section of the capital city Accra, showed that

conjugal partnership is the dominant pattern for women in their late twenties and early thirties, but in sharp contrast to the domestic cycle for men, it is not dominant through the rest of the female life-cycle. Between the ages of 35 and 50 conjugal partnership for women is only a subdominant household residence role, and of even less importance for women older than 50. Single parenthood, present throughout the female life-cycle in Adabraka, becomes a subdominant role in the late thirties, and dominant for women in their forties. (Sanjek, 1983: 340)

The age of the eight single-parent women in this study varied between mid 30s to early 50s. Furthermore, even married couples frequently live apart in many ethnic groups in Ghana, and this may be the case also in London, as Stapleton notes:

Separate households for man and wife can be perfectly normal and social workers should beware of assuming that if husband and wife are apart there is something wrong with the marriage. (Stapleton, 1978a: 20)

There was a problem obtaining informants from different SES backgrounds as most of the migrants who arrived in the early years were from wealthier backgrounds and I was not able to recruit many informants who had arrived later. The whole issue of socioeconomic position was a tricky one. Many informants were not forthcoming with information about their financial and/or occupational background. Like so many other migrant groups, Ghanaians with a qualification or degree from Ghana do not always succeed in obtaining corresponding work in the UK. A Ghanaian who has a degree but works in a factory will keep quiet about his job, especially among other Ghanaians. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of information on education and employment, I didn't always pursue the topic until I knew the person better. Although I was able to find out about the background of most of the main informants, the educational and professional background of many of the other informants remained hazy.

Most of the informants involved in the study had time for the research in the evenings and/or weekends, some managing to see me even during the day time due to shift or part-time work. It would be interesting to assess food-preparation

strategies and eating patterns in families where women (and their partners in two-parent households) have several jobs. These families may remain unavailable for research but they pose the real challenge as far as health promotion efforts are concerned.

A great deal has been published on the accuracy of information obtained on past eating habits, whether 24-hour diet recalls or other food recall methods (e.g. Quandt, 1986; Quandt, 1987). Recall data are associated with problems of validity and reliability (Lieberman, 1986; Quandt, 1986). There is evidence that 24-hour recall varies with age, with younger children and the elderly being more likely to forget items and inaccurately estimate quantities (Quandt, 1986). In this study first generation migrants were asked to remember a typical day, and variation of eating within a normal week, prior to migration, and all food and drink consumed during the previous day, including variation during a typical week. The 24-hour recall was repeated if the informant took part in a second or third session. Young British Ghanaians were asked a 24-hour recall. The focus was on the type of food and meals consumed, not on quantities.

Regarding past habits in Ghana, none of the informants were hesitant or admitted having forgotten the food or meals they used to eat. A few had difficulties in remembering the names of some dishes, especially those belonging to another tribe, or the name in English. Those who migrated in the 1960s and 70s had some of the clearest recollections. Some informants' memories were aided by the fact that their meal pattern in the past was quite repetitive and constant, with little variation. It seemed that those who went into detail were more interested in the subject matter and more engaged with the whole study. Some were nostalgic when thinking about their past in Ghana, and spoke at length about food and eating events (see Sutton, 2001: 54). The fact that most informants appeared to remember food-related events in Ghana pretty well does not necessarily mean

that informants provided truly accurate accounts. For example, it is possible that some mixed up the past with the present. As Sutton clarifies, “memories are not simply stored images drawn out of the brain at appropriate intervals, but are very much formed as an interaction between the past and the present ....” (Sutton, 2001: 9) Furthermore, as Pliner and Rozin point out, the inaccuracies are not necessarily relevant:

Because we live with so many meals in our minds, it would seem reasonable to ask about the relation between the memorial representation of the meal and the actual experience of the meal. This is of particular importance because when we make a food choice now, it is based on our memories of relevant past experiences with the same or similar foods, not our actual experience with the foods. Insofar as the memories differ from the actual experience, it is the memories that are relevant. (Pliner & Rozin, 2000: 25)

Considering one of the aims of the study, which was to understand the way in which past food habits influence migrants’ current way of eating, the above point is quite valid.

Regarding current habits, the possible inaccuracies of children were balanced by the fact that the main informant, the mother, usually reported on their food intake as well. Adult females have been found to be more accurate in their recall of foods (Quandt, 1986).

## **2.10. Summary**

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted within the Ghanaian community in London, households forming the main site of investigation. Other sites included Ghanaian food retail outlets and restaurants, as well as Ghanaian social gatherings. Access to the community was negotiated with the help of key informants and through Ghanaian associations, churches and social functions. Households were recruited by snowball sampling. Eighteen Ghanaian households varying in size, ethnic (tribal) background, length of stay in the UK and socioeconomic status took part in the study, as well as a number of other

(key) informants. Informal and in-depth interviews, and participant observation formed the main tools of data collection. All in-depth interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim or summarised and entered into QSR NVivo for analysis. Fieldnotes as well as other relevant printed or published material (in newspapers, magazines and the Internet) on the Ghanaian community served as further sources of information.

### **3. MEMORIES OF GHANA: GHANAIAAN FOOD AND THE ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

When migrants prepare food and meals in the new host country, they draw on their memories of food and eating in the past, and the tendency for many is to continue eating in a similar fashion as before, as this forms a significant aspect of maintaining their ethnic identities. The main meal of the day is usually the last to change in character. After several years of uninterrupted stay, memories may fade and become inaccurate, but in considering current food choices and habits, the memories of past experiences with the same or similar foods are relevant (Pliner & Rozin, 2000: 25).

This first results chapter is based mainly on recollections of food and eating in Ghana, although some reference is also made to current practices. It addresses two of the research questions: What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups? How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels?

The chapter deals with the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways in the Ghanaian context, and the structure of food and eating in the past. In regard to the eating system, the focus is on the horizontal spheres: primarily on the meal format, but also on the eating pattern and meal cycle. The chapter provides the backdrop and past context against which current habits can be analysed and understood.

After an initial discussion about the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways in the Ghanaian context, I analyse the informants' shared understandings of eating events based on their memories of food and eating in Ghana. The analysis focuses first on weekday and weekend main meals, then on

other eating events, including festive meals. Following a discussion on the diminishing ethnic contrasts in foods and meals in Ghana, I examine the notion of a 'proper meal'.

The chapter draws attention to the diminishing ethnic diversity of eating habits in Ghana. As regards the meal structure, it shows that main meals in Ghana, as recalled by informants, were based on a few basic formats and that there was little differentiation in recipes or formats with regard to socioeconomic status or occasion. Furthermore, Ghanaians were usually familiar with some features of 'British food culture' already prior to migration, in particular those who attended boarding school. Heavy familiar food characterised proper meals.

The terms 'Ghanaian' and 'African' are used interchangeably for food available in sub-Saharan West Africa, and 'European' for typically English and other European food available in the UK. This was the terminology used also by the informants. Many actually spoke about *African* food, which is logical as some of the basic foodstuffs are available throughout (West) Africa, but it could also have been because they were speaking to a white European.

### **3.1. Ethnic or tribal variation of meals within Ghana**

The main informants migrated to the UK between 1965 and 1993. Hence, collectively their memories about Ghana relate to over a 30-year time span, from late 1950s to 1990<sup>46</sup>. In this time period, Ghana experienced vast changes in its political and economic life (Rimmer, 1992) that impacted on the availability and cost of food (Goody & Goody, 1995; Oppong & Abu, 1987). A decade before and after independence (1957), Ghanaians enjoyed a relatively high standard of living

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<sup>46</sup> Since most of the informants migrated to the UK in their early or mid 20s, they reflected on the time when still living with their parents or other kin. Only a few migrated in their 30s, or after establishing a family in Ghana. One informant arrived when she was 11 or 12, but she still remembered details of food and eating practices in Ghana.



in comparison with many other countries of the West African region (Oppong & Abu, 1987). In the 1960s and 1970s there was a phase of stagnation and strong regression in real incomes (Rimmer, 1992). In the 1970s, economic growth reversed decisively: it was a time of hyperinflation of the local currency, the cedi. Oppong and Abu report chronic shortages of consumer goods in the late 1970s, such as sugar, rice, milk, flour and soap and how queuing had begun to constitute a way of life (Oppong & Abu, 1987: 18). Economic recovery begun only in 1983 (Rimmer, 1992).

Yet, apart from a few exceptions, informants did not refer to food shortages. The majority of them were from middle class or wealthier backgrounds (or the *elite* as Goody would phrase it<sup>47</sup>) and from urban areas of the southern half of Ghana. Seasonal shortages that were common in the north and also among the rural poor would have had less impact on them. Three informants indicated that they grew up primarily in rural areas (i.e. in villages), and only one reflected on times when food was scarce. The fact that others did not do so, does not, nevertheless, exclude the possibility that they might have gone through periods of uncertainty. Food shortage was simply not part of the interview agenda. Notably, none of the informants came from a purely farming background.

The majority of the main informants grew up in the main urban centres of Ghana (Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Cape Coast), although generally their families originated from some smaller locality or village. Most individuals had lived in various parts of Ghana before migrating, and a number also in different family settings that affected their eating habits. The majority of those who attended secondary school (14) did so in a different region from that of their hometown (i.e.

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<sup>47</sup> Goody writes: "the growth of a nation state has lead to the emergence of an elite involved in administrative, professional, political and military activities, an elite that constitutes a 'new class'. Although this class is spoken of as the bourgeoisie or middle class it is in fact the ruling class, and it seems curious to refer to an emergent middle class when locally at least there is no one else on top." (Goody, 1982: 175)

boarding school), exposing them to yet another eating setting or sub-culture. The disintegration of families through marital disruption and re-marriage, the mobile character of Civil Service employment, the migration of parents abroad and the reliance on kin to look after children appeared to be the main reasons for growing up in different family settings, or households (see also Oppong, 1974: 80). The following are two examples of the type of mobility experienced by some of the informants when still living in Ghana:

### **Two examples of mobility**

#### **Case study 1 – Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973)<sup>48</sup>**

Caroline joined her parents in the UK at the age of 18, in 1973. She is their eldest child and has six siblings, three of whom were born in the UK. Caroline's father (Ashanti) first migrated to the UK sometime in the 1950s, leaving his wife (Fanti) and children behind. They lived in Kumasi until Caroline's mother joined her husband in London in the late 1950s, leaving the children behind. Caroline and her brother, who already attended school, went to live with a neighbouring family (Fanti). Their two younger siblings stayed with their grandmother as they were still very young. Caroline's foster father worked for the government and his work took them up to Tamale in northern Ghana at one point, where they lived for four years. While they were in Tamale, Caroline used to go to Kumasi during the school holidays and stayed with relatives there. After four years they returned to Kumasi, and Caroline and her brother went to join their parents in Accra who had returned from the UK to live in Ghana again. Caroline attended secondary school there. However, her parents didn't stay long and returned to the UK. This time they took Caroline's brother with them, but she went to Kumasi to live with an auntie. She lived there until she joined her parents in the UK. Her parents and siblings all live in London.

#### **Case study 2 – Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969)**

Serwa was born in Accra where her mother (Ewe) was working as a midwife in a government hospital. When she was still quite young, her father (also Ewe) who was a senior civil servant was transferred to Kumasi. Serwa's mother also found work there and she followed with the children. Serwa had one older and two younger siblings. Serwa went to school in Kumasi. At some point her father was transferred to a village in the northern part of Volta Region and they all followed him. Serwa went to school in the village, but for preparatory school she moved to Accra to live with one of her aunts. For secondary school she moved to Ho, which was back in the Volta Region. After finishing her O levels she migrated to the UK in 1969 to study.

All informants belonged to tribes of the southern half of Ghana: the Ashanti, Fanti, Ga, Ewe, Akuapim, Kwahu, Nzima, Krobo, and Ada. The majority of them belonged to the first four tribes, but a number were of mixed ethnic background,

<sup>48</sup> As already indicated, pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis. The information within the brackets refers to the household (hhJ), ethnic background of 1<sup>st</sup> generation migrants (Ashanti/Fanti), age (44), and year of migration (1973) of the informant. For British-born Ghanaians, there is no reference to the ethnic group.

reflecting the increase in inter-ethnic marriage in Ghana (Nukunya, 1992). According to one informant, in the past Ghanaians were particular that their daughter or son married someone from the same tribe, but mobility and attending boarding schools had contributed to breaking down barriers between tribes (see also Elam et al., 2000).

Indeed, although informants used the terms Ghanaian, and even African, when discussing their food culture, the analysis of Ghanaian meals actually meant examining foods and dishes of the various tribes of Ghana. In other words, Ghanaian food habits were by no means homogenous.

And they [Ashantis] like their nkontomire and the green banana and yam, you see. Ashanti man don't even [like] this fish and crisps. Give me fufu. This is their native food. If you're married to an Ashanti man don't give him this roasted beef, the roasted chicken and all that and all that. Gas like their fish and kenkey. The Ewes like their fish as well but they like their banku, you see. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 126<sup>49</sup>

When speaking about their food habits, it was clear that apart from identifying themselves as Ghanaians, or even as Africans, when talking to a 'European', informants were also identifying themselves as part of one of the several tribes of Ghana. They were well aware of alleged differences in food habits, and often when talking about their own tribal food habits, referred to those of others:

I don't like sweet. Because I'm an Ashanti woman [laughs]. Ashantis we're not like the Fantis, we don't eat sweet things. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 803

Although to an outsider the Akan are a tribal grouping, among themselves it was clear that - as far as food habits are concerned - members of each Akan tribe (e.g. Ashanti vs. Fanti) considered themselves as different from other tribes (see Nukunya, 1992: 225).

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<sup>49</sup> The figures after the biographical data refer to the interview (1<sup>st</sup> interview) and the paragraph (pg) in NVivo.

Some informants made it clear that they did not eat a food or dishes consumed by others, hence distancing themselves from the other tribes. Food was a marker of difference and boundaries, and belonging.

Grace: Some people eat soup and rice. But I don't.

HT: You don't. So

Grace: Well I'm typical Ashanti, Ashanti woman so [laughs]. So we don't eat soup and rice, not like the Fantis and the Gas. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 302-10

But the dried ones [i.e. snails] the people from Kumasi, Ashanti people they like eating that, we down the south never used the dry ones, we used the fresh ones. They put them on sticks. ... They prepare some kind of different soup that they put them in it. But I haven't bought any no. Because down in Accra the Ga people like it fresh. Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 87

More frequently however, they identified themselves *positively* as eating certain foods because they belonged to a certain tribe, some emphasising that they *needed* a food, or a dish, prepared in a certain way, for this particular reason.

You know the Twis and the Fantis they have the ampesi. But we the Gas normally have kenkey, that's what we normally eat a lot, kenkey a lot of kenkey. ... The Fantis too they've got their own Fanti kenkey. Pauline<sup>50</sup> (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 19

Because we were the typical Ashanti who had just plantain, yam and .... Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 244

We eat more rice and stew. And weekends we eat yam, potatoes, corn beef stew, with corn beef stew or fish stew. As I'm saying we're Fantis. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 5

We boil the green plantain and we mash it in earthenware. Mash it until it's .. it's oto, have you hear of oto? You see if you talk to Fantis, Fantis don't eat that. We Ashantis eat this. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 371-5

Many pointed out differences in regard to other tribes. Tribal affiliation was seen to be one of the main causes for variation in eating habits among Ghanaians, whether in Ghana or in London.

The reasons that we've got different tastes is because he is a Ga, I am a Fanti. Fantis tend to have a sort of a more of a British way of eating, but not really British. But Gas are typical, you couldn't compare Gas with Ashantis. Because they like their food in a more of a traditional way. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 37

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<sup>50</sup> Many informants with a mixed ethnic background seemed to identify themselves more with one tribe than the other.

This is the general pattern because we're Fantis you see. Other families they can have banku with okra stew, with meat and all that and you know, *no choice*. You see, all the family will eat all that. But as I said we as Fantis have got a different diet, a different style of eating, a different kind of habit. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 9

Food habits or the way in which individuals classified foods reflected the way in which they positioned themselves in their community and in relationship to others within the community (see also Searles, 2002). Coastal tribes, for example Fantis and Nzemas, were associated with foods and eating habits of the former colonial rulers whose influence in the region had been far greater than in the inner parts of the country. They distanced themselves from other tribal groups whose foodways were seen to be more traditional.

Some saw food habits of other tribes as a source of wit and humour, which is a common phenomenon in ethnocentrism<sup>51</sup> (Fieldhouse, 1986).

The Fanti people they they laugh at the Ashantis! They don't know nothing, they don't know how to cook, they don't know how to do this, but because of the Fantis like to *explore*, they like the good taste of food of good living. Ashanti people haven't got time for all these .... Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1125-31

We [the Nzemas] are the 'butter-milk people'. Those days we'd eat butter and cheese. So we got the taste for that, we need it in our food. We are teased about being the butter-milk people. You must have your butter in your food and must have your teas. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 188

Quite naturally, regional differences in the availability of staple and other foods in Ghana had moulded the regional food cultures. As an example, inland people were used to handling grilled, dried 'bushmeat' and smoked, dried fish, but not fresh meat or fish.

FIELDNOTES: Elisabeth explains that where she comes from she is used to meat that has been grilled, dry meat [i.e. bush meat], so until she came to this country she would never touch fresh meat or fresh fish. Even the thought of fresh meat or fish seemed to be unpleasant to her. She came from the interior, and she wasn't exposed to fresh fish etc. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 367

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<sup>51</sup> Ethnocentrism refers to "the consciousness of being collectively different as a group and an evaluation of other groups in terms of the standards of one's own group." (Nukunya, 1992: 223) Food ridicule has been considered as one of the criteria determining the boundaries of a culture (Fieldhouse, 1986).

There were also differences in preferred cooking methods, as well as cooking utensils and techniques. Ashantis were renowned for uncomplicated recipes and fewer ingredients whereas Fantis were known to favour the opposite:

The Fantis instead of grinding all this and doing all this they would rather put oil in stew, make it rich you know .. because of the white people who came there brought them cheese and everything [laughs] they prefer to live white people's lives [laughs]. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 430

... but the people from the sea [i.e. the Fanti] because of the white people who landed there, they like *cheese*, tin of *milk*, make *tea*, fry *eggs*, yeah! The Fantis, yeah their way of living! They like all these *nice sweet things*, pancakes and stuff. My you wouldn't get any Ashanti to serve you all these things. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1105

Below are two recipes for *nkontomire* stew as recounted by two informants, one a Fanti (coast), the other an Ashanti (inland). Worth noting is the different method of cooking, as well as the variety of ingredients, the Fanti one being richer and more laborious.

#### Two recipes for *Nkontomire* stew

##### Fanti recipe

Lillian: You put it in it with your onions fry up your onions and your pepper [in oil], and your tomatoes and then when that is properly cooked then you add your spinach [nkontomire] to it. Another thing is these round - I don't think I've got any but it's called agushi. It's these round things that you

HT: The white stuff

Lillian: Yes yeah put bit in and they look like eggs, little eggs. And the meat that you can put in is salted beef, and ehm what do you call it [chuckles] in English ehm wele is the hide of I think it's ehm pig, it's pig's hide. ... you steam it and when it gets soft you put it in it. And you can add crab, you can add snails, the big ones, not the one that French, the big ones, fish, whatever you want to put in it, and eggs you can boil eggs as well, and add it to it. And with that you eat it with yam or cocoyam, you can eat it with cassava as well, or green plantain. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 148-152

##### Ashanti recipe

You see the Fantis they stew and cook and cook. My mother if you overboil the greens she wouldn't eat it. So it's got to be just lightly boiled. *Mash* it in the earthenware, put a bit of fresh tomato but boil it all. We used to put it in the fire you know the open fire. We put it in it and then it gives it a nice flavour. Mash it with the greens, a bit of pepper, onions and stockfish and then put oil on it and we don't even put it on the fire at all. We eat it like that. ... So that's the typical Ashanti way of eating. And that goes with green plantain. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 334

There were differences in staples and sauces based on the regional availability of ingredients (e.g. coast vs. inland), particular cooking techniques and rules, as well as individual preferences and tribal patterns.

The flavour and the smell of the soup from the coast is different from soup in the Akan area, where they use dried fish and mushroom and snails. In the coastal area they use crab or octopus or shrimps to give the soup flavour. But it's the same lightsoup. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 55

Most meals, however, followed a similar format, which defined them as typically Ghanaian.

### 3.2. Focus on meal formats in Ghana

Without going into detail about the eating pattern here, all informants but one used to eat three times a day during the week in Ghana, some having only two meals over the weekend. Focusing on the actual eating events, they generally comprised only one main course, a common characteristic of meals in other parts of Africa as well (Goody, 1982; Spittler, 1993). Only a few indicated that they had fruit, albeit infrequently, after the main meal on weekdays.

The actual structure of the one-course meal varied to some extent according to the mealtime and the day of week, but there was hardly any variation according to socioeconomic status, and very little according to tribe. Gender differences in eating were also evident. These generally surfaced when informants spoke about their *parents'* practices.

First and foremost you got to really satisfy the old boys, you know, the husbands because they eat the best part of the whole food.<sup>52</sup> James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 783

Quantity of food was perhaps the most prominent gender difference in eating habits. Yet not only gender but also age emerged as an intra-household

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<sup>52</sup> Although informants spoke about the past, they frequently used the present tense.

determinant of eating: some informants provided evidence that children did not always eat the same food as adults.

### 3.2.1. Weekday main meals in Ghana

The main meal of the day was the evening meal and the one course meal had generally either a two- or three-part structure. The most common two-part meal consisted of a solid starchy staple bland or sour in taste and a liquid or oily sauce (i.e. soup or stew) which was highly seasoned ('hot'). Both items were always prepared or cooked separately and eaten while still warm. The staple was either in the form of a large dumpling (e.g. *fufu*, *banku*, *kenkey*), 'dry' chunks of boiled staples (e.g. *ampesie*), or in a granular form (e.g. rice). The sauce contained vegetables (sometimes pulses), meat *and/or* fish (and/or shellfish, and/or snails; chicken alone), as well as fat or oil, which was either an additional ingredient, as in stews, or incorporated into the other ingredients in soups (for example, groundnut paste, palmtree extract, i.e. oily seeds and nuts). The three ingredients that appeared as a rule in most stews were onions, chilli pepper and tomatoes and the correct cooking of these basic foodstuffs was crucial for the right flavour. Notably, sauces in wealthier families included more meat and much more frequently chicken.

Although quite different in appearance, *fufu* and soup, as well as *ampesie* and stew – both dishes strongly associated with the Ashanti and other inland Akan groups – were good examples of dishes that fitted this classification. Yet it was possible to form a two-part meal with any of the other staples as well. Two-part meals consisting of a staple and *soup* were most frequently eaten with fingers.

The three-part meal consisted of a bland or sour staple, a centre piece (generally fish), and a 'hot' sauce. Good examples were *kenkey*, *banku*, *yakayeke*, or



*akyeke*<sup>53</sup> with grilled or fried fish and an accompanying sauce. Notable is that all these dishes were associated with people with easy access to fresh fish, i.e. coastal people (Ga, Fanti, Ewe, Nzema). Furthermore, the common staple in all the dishes was corn or maize, a crop introduced to Ghana in the precolonial era. The sauce was either gravy (a basic tomato stew, Fanti way) but more commonly it was a fresh pepper sauce, with uncooked tomatoes, onion and chilli pepper chopped and mixed (Fanti) or ground (Ashanti) together. Another pepper sauce, a cold condiment commonly known as *shito* linked with the Ga, was made from dried, *fried* ingredients, including shrimps and fish.

Apart from the two formats, there was a third one, a one-part meal in which the staple and the sauce were combined in the cooking process (one-pot dish). *Jollof rice*, a popular dish throughout West Africa originating most likely from the Gambia (Osseo-Asare, 1993) or Senegal (Goody & Goody, 1995) was the most frequently mentioned, especially by the Fantis as an evening meal. Others such as *mpotompoto*, and *gari foto* were hardly mentioned, suggesting that they did not play a big part on the menus in the households<sup>54</sup>. A further one-part dish was *oto* (or *eto*), mashed cooked plantain seasoned with a few 'condiments'. This was another good example of the preferred Ashanti way of food preparation, in which quickness and convenience matter<sup>55</sup>.

And like the poor people you just eat it like that. You've got the onions and the stock fish and the pepper to flavour and the oil. Some people they were very very poor and couldn't even afford oil. And they ate it like that. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 371-5

<sup>53</sup> The Nzema staple *akyeke* is in fact slightly different from the others in that palm oil is mixed with the cassava granules to give it an orange colour. It resembles in this respect *dzempkle*, a special Ewe dish, in which roasted ground corn is cooked in a stew and served with additional stew, as well as meat, fish or crab cooked separately. *Dzempkle* is traditionally served at a special Ewe festival, but can also be prepared for other festive occasions and at weekends (Dovlo et al., 1985; Dovlo, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> A key informant explained that *mpotompoto* was a dish preferred by Ashanti farmers when going to work in the fields.

<sup>55</sup> Ikpe describes similar dishes to *eto* and *mpotompoto* in her account of pre-colonial consumption practices in Nigeria, and calls them 'hot-pots' (Ikpe, 1994: 45).

*Eto* made with yam, a more expensive ingredient than plantain, with a boiled egg on top was also prepared for customary rites, such as the coming of age of girls, and birthdays.

The dominance of the staple in the meal was evident in the way in which the informants spoke about meals. They customarily mentioned the staple first, generally not even specifying the other part/s of the meal, which is contrary to the way in which many white British would speak about a meal<sup>56</sup> (see e.g. Bush et al., 1998):

Patrick: Okay evenings, sort of heavy, yeah, yam, kenkey, fufu, ehm rice, ehm basically fufu, rice, yam, plantain, mmm basically that's it.

HT: So what would go with these?

Patrick: Okay with fufu it's soup, basically, yeah I mean that's what you usually eat fufu with, and the soup can be peanut soup, palm soup, light soup, and with the rice it can go with spinach stew, garden egg stew, gravy. Patrick (hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 10-12

The emphasis on the staple has been observed by Dovlo et al. as well, who point out that it is typical among people who rely on starchy roots and tubers and cereals for the main part of the meal (Dovlo et al., 1985: 10). The staple in the dish was often, in fact, a combination of two staples: for example, *fufu* a mix of pounded plantain and cassava (or yam); *banku* a mix of fermented corn dough and cassava dough. *Ampesie*, on the other hand, was either one staple alone or a mix of plantain, yam and/or cocoyam<sup>57</sup>. Yet, despite the emphasis on the staple, it couldn't constitute a meal on its own:

So our food is already *balanced*, you can't eat one without one. Deborah (hhF, Fanti, 35+, 1988) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 2886

There was clearly a common understanding about the different ways in which the basic items could be combined. One of the fundamental rules was that *fufu* was

<sup>56</sup> Bush et al. (1998) report how Scottish women emphasised meat when describing the traditional Sunday roast and often left out any other components of the meal.

<sup>57</sup> A dish that combined two staples in an unc customary manner was fried plantain with bean stew, to which *gari* was added by sprinkling it on top.

always eaten with soup, never with a stew. Other rules defining the type of sauce accompanying the staple were less rigid, although certain preferences appeared to be widespread. For example, *banku* could be eaten with any soup or a stew (and fish) or fresh pepper sauce, yet a preferred accompaniment was okra stew or okra soup.

In fact, many of the two-part meals, such as *fufu* and soup, resembled main meals in other parts of Africa, although the texture of smooth *fufu* is different from the coarse millet porridges of the Bemba (Richards, 1939; Richards & Widdowson, 1936), the Tallensi (Fortes & Fortes, 1936), or the Kel Ewey Tuareg (Rasmussen, 1996; Spittler, 1993). Yet similarly to sauces in these tribes, the function of the soup in the Ghanaian (or Ashanti) meal is to make the swallowing of bland *fufu* easier and tastier (see Richards, 1939; Rozin, 2000). Like *ubwali* and *umunani* among the Bemba (Richards, 1939), *fufu* and soup together, or any of the other main combinations, are considered to form a perfect meal.

### **3.2.2. Weekend main meal in Ghana**

On Sundays, the two-part meal was the most popular main meal in most ethnic groups, with *fufu* and palmnut soup or groundnut soup appearing on the menu in most households. *Emutuo*, made with the more prestigious staple rice, and served with palmsoup, was another popular staple, prepared generally only at weekends.

Chicken was a regular ingredient for the weekend soup or a stew in wealthier households. In one family a goat or sheep was regularly slaughtered as well. Chicken featured on the menu in poorer households only on special occasions (see section 3.2.4). In families from the Ashanti or Eastern regions bushmeat appeared also as an ingredient in the sauce.

A few families had a sweet or dessert after the main meal on a Sunday, albeit not regularly. One mentioned a variety of fresh fruit; another ice cream, pancakes and crumble with custard, hence, indicating transformed habits through colonial influence.

Ehm my Mum was ehm, how would I say it, she studied in Yorkshire. She was a home scientist. So, she literally brought me up the English way. After meal, you have to have a dessert<sup>58</sup>. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1047

### 3.2.3. Breakfast and lunch – new formats and habits in Ghana

Although it was possible to eat a substantial meal based on the two- or three-part structures for breakfast or lunch, many of the dishes eaten in the morning did not fit any of the above formats. These included various fermented gruels and porridges commonly eaten with bread, ‘tea’ and bread, and cooked English breakfasts. These types of dishes were favoured by Fantis, and the latter was served only at weekends in wealthier, not exclusively Fanti, families.

Sunday morning we had proper English breakfast and that would be fried eggs, depends on how you like it, whoever is preparing it will do it for you .. sausages bacon, tomatoes .. cereal, again it depends on what you like, and tea, toast, all that. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 358

With regard to ‘tea and bread’, a liquid, or drink, can be seen as a *component* of the meal. Apart from a few exceptions, the only other beverage that was drunk regularly was water, or ‘ice water’<sup>59</sup>. However, it was never mentioned unless I queried about it specifically. In other words, it was not seen as part of a meal.

Some of the foods sold by the roadside and purchased for lunch or breakfast did not follow any of the above formats either. Roasted plantain and peanuts was one example, as well as other snack-type foods such as *kelewele*. Another

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<sup>58</sup> After further inquiry it transpired that a dessert was part of the weekend meal only occasionally.

<sup>59</sup> Soft drinks were bought only on special occasions, such as Christmas.

example was *waakye*, a northern dish, including rice cooked with beans and served with stew and possibly *garri*<sup>60</sup>.

Many of the dishes eaten for breakfast and lunch can be seen to form 'minor meals', a term coined by Douglas and Nicod (1974). It seems that not only new foods (condensed milk, sugar, bread, beverages, ideas for snack foods) but also new meal formats were introduced in Ghana through colonialism and especially through the early morning meal, which traditionally consisted of heavier indigenous foods or dishes, often leftovers from the previous evening (see Goody & Goody, 1995; Ikpe, 1994: 87-8).

In some families, gender and age differences in food consumption habits were more apparent at breakfast and lunch.

And my father, when we were in Accra, he would come home for lunch and I used to say to people, you know I used to know about steamed cod, chunks of cod before I came here [chuckles], because when he came at lunch time, he'd have boiled potatoes or fried potatoes, and he'd have steamed cod, or any lump of fish, steamed with onions and vegetables and. Used to look delicious.

So he'd have something like that. And he'd have lemon tea in the afternoon. You know at his memorial I was you know paying a tribute and I said you know my father used to drink out of china. You know in Ghana he wouldn't wake up until you took him his cup of tea in the morning. But that's not a typical, you know a family thing. You know some people have tea yes, but not every morning. And then lemon tea every afternoon, but that's what you know Dad did, you know ... his diet was more European than us all. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1272

Well educated men, especially those working in the civil service, appeared to be in a more privileged position in wealthier families. In other words, the spread of Western habits was limited to these in some households.

### 3.2.4. Feasts – Christmas in Ghana

Ghanaian informants remembered special festive occasions in detail.

... we all remember special meals, either because of their very high or low culinary quality, their unusual nature, or important nonculinary events that occurred at the meal (first dates, proposals of marriage, and the like). (Pliner & Rozin, 2000: 25)

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<sup>60</sup> Rice, although cultivated in northern parts of Ghana, became more widely used quite late in time (imports).

All informants were Christians and the most prominent festivity for them in the past was Christmas, a tradition brought to them by a host of European missionaries. Christmas was recalled with good humour and memories were aided not only by the difference in customs and atmosphere between Britain and Ghana, but also by the fact that Christmas was quite unlike any other time in Ghana. It was the time for abundance as well as special food, or rather, special ingredients, as most of the basic dishes – e.g. *fufu* and soup – remained unchanged.

As aforementioned, in the poorer households it was usually one of the few occasions that a chicken was slaughtered for the soup. In a less wealthy Ga family, it was also one of the rare instances when they had yam or rice. In some better off households chicken retained the status of special food. An Ashanti informant remembered Christmas Day in detail, the following quote highlighting also the influence of colonial imports.

My Christmas, and I always tell my children [laughs], my Christmas day starts lets say in the morning, it's the only day in the year that I will have oats. Quaker oats! [laughs] As a child, a nine year old, ten year old. That's what I can remember. So my morning starts with my Quaker oats and I got dressed and then we go to church. And some people will stay behind which is normally the maids and the older girls, and we come back and it's always fufu and chicken soup. Yeah and the chicken normally you kept it in the backyard for about a week and you bring it out and slaughter it, and clean it. So and after that you put on your nice Christmas dress and go and knock on the neighbours' doors, and they'll give you biscuits, they were rounded biscuits, cream crac- no they were called crackers. Cause it was made by (Pioneer) biscuits which was in Kumasi. And sometimes you string them and put them around your neck [laughs].

And I remember maybe when I was about five or six my first memory of Christmas is having what they called Potello. It's something like a Ribena now, but it was in a bottle. And I remember normally it discoloured your teeth and your tongue and you sip it and you run straight to the street and stick your tongue out (for everyone to know) that you've just had Potello at home.

... I mean we weren't poor, but this was I mean this type of Christmas I'm describing to you was the maybe one of the best [laughs] (in the area). And in the *evening* we always had corned beef stew with yam, and it was a tradition in my house for as long as I was at home, until I left home. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 379-385

Wealthier families who could afford chicken regularly at the weekend, opted for goat and/or turkey at Christmas. Abundance of meat was characteristic of these households.

At Christmas, we slaughtered goats and turkey, fresh turkeys and chicken. But chicken we normally ate it on Sundays, my Dad always bought goat for Christmas, or either goat or turkey. Geraldine (hhP, Ashanti/Kwahu, 45+, 1986) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 81

Well like my dad used to kill a goat or sheep. So you roasted some, you boiled some, you're making some in soup, you're making some in stew, food is everywhere! you know. So you pig yourselves. Apart from people coming in and out, not necessarily throwing a party but it ends up like a party, because people are coming and going. And that's when my mother would do all the salads .... Everything. ... Turkey for one we wouldn't actually roast it like we roast it here, we cook it in a big pot of soup you know. And then maybe my mum will roast a little chicken. Because roast is always dry anyway. So she will rather roast a little chicken and then cook turkey with the soup and we'll have fufu, we'll have jollof, we'll have salads and we .. and you name it. We have all sorts of little pick things you know. We don't normally have it as a weekly thing or a daily thing. And it carries on until after New Year. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 191-5

In a Ga household, in which the mother was a caterer, they would have a variety of dishes, including foreign ones as well.

Christmas in particular it's more of like, a little bit to the European side of things. But we didn't miss our fufu and soup, it was there as well. We had curry and whatever, salad and you know<sup>61</sup>. Patrick (hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 49

Fanti households in particular went for such things as cakes, pastries, meat pies, doughnuts and salad. In an Ewe household, a special stew was prepared from goat meat, cooked with the blood. This stew was eaten with *abolo*, or rice. Ashantis had *fufu* and chicken soup.

Despite the lavish spread of food in some households and the abundance of meat, especially chicken, most of the main dishes prepared followed the typical two-part or three-part structure. If any other dishes were served they were non-Ghanaian. Snack foods were consumed but they did not form part of the meal.

Hence in Ghana, there appeared to be few special or differentiated recipes for festive occasions, the main difference being the amount and type of meat used for sauces. Furthermore, roasting of meat occurred in wealthier households.

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<sup>61</sup> Narayan points out that colonialism resulted not only in the migration of curry powder – a 'fabricated entity' created by the colonizers – to England but also to its 'far-flung' colonies. (Narayan, 1995: 72)

### 3.3. Diminishing tribal differences in Ghana

Although the informants emphasised tribal differences in eating habits, there was already evidence of diminishing contrasts between groups in Ghana. Some formerly regional or local dishes were clearly becoming national favourites, one of these being *banku*. Furthermore, for the majority of informants, irrespective of their tribal background, the weekend equalled the preparation and serving of palmnut or groundnut soup, which was generally served with *fufu*, many Fanti families opting for it as well. It also appeared that Ghanaians who had migrated relatively recently to Britain – in the early 1990s – were more likely in the past to have eaten dishes linked with another tribal group than those who had migrated earlier on.

Interethnic marriage played a role. In families, in which parents were of different tribal backgrounds, favourite dishes of both groups were prepared on a regular basis. Informants with such an upbringing were well rehearsed in the varying tribal foodways.

Any Fanti will tell you, they wouldn't speak as I'm speaking because I've got two sides ehm mixed race or whatever they call it. I know my dad's [Ashanti] side and my Fanti side, so I'm speaking in both ways. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 433-6

Street vendors of cooked food also played a role in the spread of dishes, such as *kenkey* or *waakye*, even plain rice and stew. In urban areas, where most informants lived, street vendors included migrants from other parts of the country. For example, in Kumasi there were Fanti women making *kenkey* for Ashantis who were acquiring a taste for the fermented corndough dumplings. School children and adults bought lunch from street vendors, although some families did not favour, or approve of, the practice.

But in Ghana we never really bought cooked food from outside. You were not allowed to. Not in our house anyway. But people do, we didn't, we didn't dare. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup>), pg 221



Abby (hhG) who was an Ashanti trader at Kumasi market before migrating to the UK seven years prior to the study ate *kenkey* regularly for her midday meal, or sometimes even for breakfast. There were other dishes, such as Hausa *koko* (a northern dish) that were generally purchased from street vendors rather than prepared at home.

But when we were younger far younger ... a lot of mothers preferred to give the money to the kids to go buy stuff on the way to school (and eat). James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 455

In Kumasi it [yokegari] wasn't a typical diet, but we had people selling them. It wasn't something we would make in our house. But it's one of those staples that people go for, just like people here go in for a curry. It's not part of your culture, [HT: it comes from somewhere] ehe *comes* into your daily or weekly diet. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 369

Clark also noticed the wide variety of steamed, fried, baked or boiled items of diverse ethnic origins that were relished for lunch and snacks by Ashantis in Kumasi who were very conservative about their evening meal (Clark, 1994: 356).

Boarding school was another prominent institution that helped to unify eating habits amongst the better educated people, who spent the best part of up to seven years away from home. A large proportion of the informants attended boarding schools in Ghana and this was yet another indicator of their middle or upper class status, as parents had to be able to afford the fees. Gladys (hhN) explained that she went to a convent school run by British nuns from Yorkshire. "So the whole culture was typically British." (1<sup>st</sup>, pg 252)

Those who attended boarding schools had to become familiar with a new set of rules and regulations, a new lifestyle and a different selection of dishes and tastes. When such a student came home on vacation, as Kwesi expressed, "he becomes the white man of the house. He becomes a semi-white person and less and less of an authentic traditional person." (3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 144) In regard to food and eating practices, as Gladys (hhN) put it, "for seven years you have these two

lives in terms of diet.” (1<sup>st</sup>, pg 275) Indeed, some of the differentiation of tastes within households may have occurred through boarding schools.

When I was in secondary school, which was you know the done thing, so I'd be in boarding school and obviously when I come back things would be different, I might not want to eat when everybody else is eating [laughs]. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 397

All informants indicated that in boarding schools, breakfast was most commonly tea (i.e. hot beverage) and bread with butter or margarine, or porridge with milk and sugar and bread. Many mentioned rice water (i.e. rice pudding) and oat porridge (i.e. Quaker oats) as common porridges. James mentioned eggs and sausages, as well as *kenkey* and fish or sardines, and explained:

I went to school in Sekondi. It was run by Americans, Brothers of the Holy Cross and I don't know if you know the concept about how Americans eat, you know you got to have a heavy breakfast to take you right through the day. So, I was brought up like that for seven years, basically in that environment so it did continue *with* me. James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1st, pg 109

Lunch was generally something different from the evening meal, which usually varied according to weekday:

If it was a Monday, Monday afternoon we tended to have *kenkey* and fish, ehm Tuesdays I don't really remember, Wednesdays we had yam and spinach. ... Thursdays we have rice and tuna stew, Fridays we call it *redred* because we had the ehm fried plantain and beans. ... Saturdays, Saturdays they didn't really bother with us because we had visiting hours, and people tend to go out. Sunday, Sunday afternoon they didn't bother with us again, in evening they just gave us porridge or what's this thing called .. tapioca. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 194-99

Dishes that never appeared on the school menu were things like *fufu* or *banku*, which were too much work to prepare for a large number of pupils. Someone explained that *ampesie* was generally yam, because plantain would become too hard and cold. All food was eaten with cutlery.

Although someone remembered having 'European' food, i.e. sausages and beefburgers, once in a while, most of the dishes served were Ghanaian. However, some schools served them in a more European style than others.

And dinner would be corned beef, rice and stew with salad. The odd version of Ghanaian food which to us then was more British than Ghanaian. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 261

This informant also explained how they used to have scones and jam as well as biscuits and orange drink in between meals, as snacks. However, most of the others recalled the inadequacy of school meals and having to rely on provisions from home or additional purchases.

You just went and hid somewhere and ate gari and shito and sardine. Or sometimes we went and bought bread you know from nearby. You couldn't go far from the hostel, so you just went and bought bread and just came and ate it with nothing, bread and butter, nothing else, and drank water [laughs]. Geraldine (hhP, Ashanti/Kwahu, 45+, 1986) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 159

### 3.4. Heavy familiar food characterise proper Ghanaian meals

Although I did not systematically query what the informants thought characterised a 'proper meal', when they spoke about food and meals, especially in the past, they used the term *heavy* a great deal:

FIELDNOTES: I ask Pauline what she thinks is a 'proper meal'.

Pauline: Something heavy like heavy food. Like home-cooked meal. Like say fufu and soup or like rice and stew and chicken and vegetables. ... Banku, kenkey. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 4

What I'm saying, because we the Gas don't fancy eating these yam and rice, most of the time we have something heavy like kenkey or gari, but even gari is not .. most of the time we eat kenkey or rice and beans or these black-eyed beans with red oil, we put the gari on top, so it soaks it and make it heavy .. with plantain. Robert (hhA, Ga, 35+, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 604

As the above quote depicts, certain staples or dishes were considered heavier than others, yet not all shared the same ideas of what constituted 'heavy' or 'light'. There were differences in opinions especially in regard to dishes served for breakfast<sup>62</sup> and lunch.

It's normally yam or plantain or something like that in the morning. It was never tea or koko. You get tea and koko when you're not well. My Mum thinks that a very light meal for sick people. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 233

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<sup>62</sup> Heavier alternatives ranged from rice or *gari* and beans, fried plantain and beans, to *kenkey* and various Ewe dishes mentioned by one of the Ewe informants. Fufu was mentioned by two Ashantis, and in one case it was leftover *fufu* from the previous day.

Although quite substantial from a European's point of view, many of the lunchtime dishes in Ghana were perceived as light or smaller meals:

Plantain, yams with maybe nkontomire stew and garden egg. At times left over palmnut soup. Those sort of things. Which is not a big meal. So you rush back (to school) and then when you come in the evening, that's when we ate a big meal which was the fufu really. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 135

Lunch time we pick. You can have you know roasted plantain, by the road side or fried plantain, or cassava or yam roasted and off you go, kind of thing. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 296

English or European food was generally perceived to form lighter meals.

When I travel I may go to a restaurant and have something to eat, even *then* sometimes I have either fish and chips or I'll have ehm some rice or whatever I feel is you know reasonable, as long as it's not very heavy, and then I have that with a cup of tea or something. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 470

Typical Western food such as sandwiches, hamburgers, omelettes, and other snack foods and drinks were not even considered *food* by many Ghanaians.

Food according to many Ghanaians was

something properly prepared and cooked under known, tested and tried traditional norms of culinary expertise as handed down by our ancestors. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) (summary of interview with other Ghanaians, p. ix)

Heavy food was preferred especially for the main meal of the day in Ghana.

I like to have one heavy meal in the evening and that's it. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 75

Mainly fufu in the evening. Because we had to go to bed with a belly full so we would sleep [laughs]. And fufu was substantial and heavy. So we *always* always every evening we had fufu. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 229

Plainly, heavy meals were favoured because they brought about total satiety, to the extent of causing sleepiness. This was also observed by Clark:

Asantes [i.e. Ashantis] consider fufu not only their favourite and most characteristic food, but the only completely satisfying food. A middle-aged woman accustomed to this extremely heavy, slow-digesting dish once asked if I could really sleep properly after eating only a huge plate of rice and stew. 'Don't you wake up in the middle of the night hungry?' (Clark, 1994: 348-9)

Although heaviness was usually linked with the staple, the term was equally used to describe palmnut or groundnut soups. In comparison to the everyday 'light

soup<sup>63</sup>, generally thickened with boiled ground garden eggs, these two soups were heavy because of their thicker consistency and oiliness or higher fat content<sup>64</sup>. Hence, food prepared at the weekend formed the heavy meal *par excellence*:

Saturday is heavy eating, we have the palmnut soup. Miriam (hhD, 35+, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 283

And weekends you usually would have palm palm soup, as well, but some Sundays you have palm soup and some peanut soup, and these are usually heavy, and once you've had it you just feel like sitting down sleeping but you don't feel like doing anything. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 375

Heaviness of food or meals was generally mentioned as the main reason for omitting starters and desserts, even snacks, none of which were a regular feature of the meal format and meal pattern:

If you see people eating salad and everything with their main food it's not our way of eating, they've *seen* it here ... we don't start with it, because the food is too *heavy*, it's *heavy* already, the main course is already heavy so we don't proceed with soup first, our soup goes with .. something heavy that's why we don't eat like that. If it's a light food like the white people they'll eat potatoes and like I say very light food, our *main* food is too heavy when you finish you wouldn't even want afters. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1677

Heaviness was emphasised especially by male informants, who indicated that in Ghana they preferred to eat heavy meals. John (hhJ) was nevertheless particular about the fact that he had just one heavy meal a day. He preferred a lighter lunch so he wouldn't fall asleep during the day. (Female informants tended to use the term heavy as well, but for *characterising* foods or meals.)

Focusing on tribal differences, Fantis appeared to favour *lighter* options for breakfast, e.g. either tea and bread, or porridge, whereas informants from the other tribal groups preferred heavier alternatives based on the two- or three-part

<sup>63</sup> An uninitiated might be surprised to hear that a *light* soup can contain pieces of meat, such as cow foot and tripe, *as well as* fish (dried salt fish), and that it is very hot. It is perceived suitable for people who are ill: "light soup is for sick people you know. ... Because it's light you know. When you are not well that's the first thing they give you oh. It's like pepper soup you know yeah." Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 571

<sup>64</sup> For similar reasons, i.e. the use of additional oil and thicker consistency, some perceived stews to be heavier than soups.

format. Fantis were also more likely to eat lighter meals in the evenings, such as rice and stew or *jollof* rice. In fact, some Fanti families seemed to have quite a varied mix of dishes during the week, as Gloria highlighted:

And then the evening will be the jollof rice. We have banku and garden eggs and okra stew some weekdays in the evenings. We have kenkey and fish some weekdays in the evenings. So the evening meals *differ* and it depends on what's on the menu. Which mum will let everyone know by the day before everyone goes, Oh this is what's being prepared in the evenings. So if you like it you come back and eat it. If you don't like it you find something else outside. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 71

Ga and Ashanti families, on the other hand, appeared to have less variation. In some families the evening meal was mostly the same starchy staple, either *kenkey* or *fufu*, respectively, both which were commonly understood to be heavy foods. Despite the repetition, this was not seen to be a problem; instead it was the preferred way.

An Ashanti man has to have *every day* otherwise they haven't eaten. So my father used to have fufu every day and my mother. Because they were typical Ashantis. We had fufu *every day*, every evening. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 78

Robert: Yeah, when you come back home in the evening that's when you have your real meal

HT: What's a real meal?

Robert: Kenkey, as usual, I have kenkey all week, like most of the time we have it with fresh fish, you get the fish from the sea, you get it from the market which is fresh, fry it or put it in the gravy. Robert (hhA, Ga, 35+, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 409-14

Hence, familiar food was another important characteristic of a proper meal for many Ghanaians.

### 3.5. Summary and conclusions

Previous research has shown that migrants usually continue eating in a similar fashion to that in their homeland, as it forms an important aspect of the maintenance of their reconstituted ethnic identities. In particular the main meal of the day retains its characteristics. Furthermore, studies also show that food intake is influenced considerably by group-shared systems of ideas or rules

concerning both the meal format and the eating pattern (Goode, 1989). Therefore, the preferences, meal formats and eating patterns of the home country need to be understood.

This chapter has addressed two of the research questions by exploring the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways among Ghanaians and by presenting group-shared understandings of the structure of meals and eating events in Ghana through the analysis of informants' memories of food and meals in the past. Knowledge of preceding habits is essential for a better understanding of the processes of change and maintenance of foodways of migrants.

One of the main findings was that food was a strong marker of tribal belonging or difference within Ghana. Informants used it as a marker of difference, to distinguish themselves from others and to identify themselves as part of one of the tribal groups of Ghana. Tribal membership was seen to be one of the main reasons for variation in eating habits. Particular staples and preparation methods characterized particular tribal groups, coastal groups being associated with foods and practices of the former colonial rulers. Despite the emphasis on differences, a closer analysis of narratives pointed at diminishing contrasts among tribal groups already in Ghana, inter-tribal marriage and boarding school contributing to the unification of eating habits.

As regards group-shared understandings of food and meals in Ghana, one of the main findings was that although there was variation in the contents of meals according to tribal background, they were usually based on similar meal formats. Main meals had a two- or three-part structure, less frequently a one-part structure. The most common two-part meal consisted of a solid or 'dry' starchy staple, bland or sour in taste and a liquid soup or oily stew, i.e. a 'wet' sauce, which was highly seasoned or 'hot'. The three-part meal, usually associated with

coastal tribal groups, consisted of a bland or sour staple, a centre piece (generally fish), and a 'hot' sauce.

A further finding was that *heaviness* resulting in complete *satiety* as well as *familiar* food typified proper meals in most tribal groups, with the weekend main meal forming the heavy meal *par excellence*. Heaviness of meals was one of the main reasons for the simple, one course, meal format, as well as for excluding snacks.

Colonial or British influence was apparent mainly in the food eaten for breakfast that together with lunch formed *minor meals*, unless traditional food was consumed. Indicators of socioeconomic status were the amount and type of meat used in sauces and English-style breakfasts. Otherwise there were no special recipes or meal formats, not even for festive occasions, such as Christmas. English foods and food practices were mainly restricted to the elite or people in higher social positions (e.g. senior males within families).

Considering identities and foodways in the Ghanaian context, the findings appear to be contrary to what Jack and Esther Goody write about it in relation to the past in Africa:

In earlier Africa, culinary arts did not play a major part in the definition of the identities of communities. In segmentary, 'tribal' societies identities were often over-lapping and cross-cutting. ... But local communities, 'tribes' did not do likewise, though they displayed some preference for the products of their own parish. Occasionally one comes across statements about Asante eating 'fufu' (mashed yam), the Frafra eating monkey .... (Goody & Goody, 1995: 12)

One of the likely explanations is that through urbanisation and national integration, which are relatively recent phenomena, food and eating habits have gained in importance as a symbol and marker of tribal affiliation in Ghana. Most informants were of urban background (or had resided in Accra, the capital, before migrating to the UK) and/or they had attended boarding school; hence they had lived in close proximity to members of other groups with differing food habits. This



was also the case in London, where most of the major tribal groups were present, especially those from southern Ghana. Consequently, when describing their own food habits and Ghanaian food culture in more general terms to an outsider, informants, above all first generation migrants, drew on apparent differences between groups, highlighting the importance of tribal food and eating practices to their own ethnic identities. This reflects Fischler's notion of food and cuisine being a "quite central component of the sense of collective belonging." (Fischler, 1988: 280)

In regard to the structure of meals and eating in the past in Ghana, a review of studies that have been carried out on food and eating in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa (see section 1.3.2) reveals that the common Ghanaian meal format consisting of one course made up of two parts is widespread in other parts of the continent as well, including the 'taste balance' of bland starchy staple and pungent sauce, although this latter aspect may vary (see Spittler, 1993). Most of the studies have been conducted among rural populations, whereas the current findings were based on memories of people largely of urban middle-class background. The two part meal was also favoured at weekends and at festive times, such as Christmas, and this indicates the lack of variation in meal format according to socioeconomic status and occasion. This confirms Goody's (1982) observation in Ghana that there are hardly any alternative or differentiated recipes, either for feasts or for class. However, through the process of urbanisation of modern society, changes may have occurred over the past twenty years, especially in urban areas.

Fran Osseo-Asare has also commented that only a heavy meal is considered a true meal among Ghanaians in Ghana (Osseo-Asare, 2002). Familiar food is a preferred characteristic of meals in other West African societies too. Gerd Spittler who is one of the few scholars to examine the role of the meal in an African

community or society in more detail and to compare it with the meal in Western food cultures, concluded that among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in Niger it is not the more elaborate dish prepared for feasts that is the complete or proper meal, but the everyday dish (Spittler, 1993). A proper meal implies, first of all, that only a few ingredients are necessary because the value of each single one is very high. Secondly, all the various criteria (satiety, healthiness, taste, easily digestible) that are used to judge the meal must be fulfilled. Thirdly, it must be a dish that can be eaten day in, day out (1993: 196). Not only poor people hold this view but also the rich who can afford to buy other ingredients as well.

De Garine has argued that in regard to meals, “traditional African societies” prefer satiety and familiarity rather than gastronomic pleasure and novelty, as in many Western societies (de Garine, 1997: 198). For example, the two Cameroonian ethnic groups he studied appreciated rice only moderately, because – although it was a modern and prestigious food item – it was not considered filling enough (de Garine, 1997: 190). In view of the situation in urban Ghana (around 15-40 years ago), as well as among Ghanaian migrants in London (see following chapters), I would claim that the preference for satiety and familiarity is not restricted to ‘traditional societies’ in Africa, but is a much wider phenomenon.

#### **4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GHANAIAAN FOOD CULTURE IN LONDON - FOOD, IDENTITY AND GENDER**

This chapter addresses the first research question – How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels? – by focusing on the community level, although some reference is made to the private sphere as well. The chapter analyses the increase in the availability of Ghanaian food and the development of Ghanaian food-related businesses as part of the growth of the Ghanaian community in London. Ethnic eating locales have been found to be a valuable means of both cultural identification and maintenance of past associations. The lack of involvement of Africans in the food and catering trade has been recognised but there has been very little research into the reasons for this.

This chapter also addresses the second research question on the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups. While the previous chapter emphasised the symbolic value of food as central to the sense of ethnic (or tribal) identity for Ghanaians at the individual and group levels, this one draws attention to what impact the shifting nature of identities can have on food choice in the migration context. I examine food shopping practices of Ghanaians, in particular the propensity to buy typically Ghanaian food, and the types of food served at large social gatherings within the Ghanaian community.

The third research question on the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities is also addressed through analysing the impact of the gendered migration of Ghanaians on the development of Ghanaian food culture.

There are four sections to this chapter. The first section provides an account of the spread of Ghanaian food in London. It also deals more closely with the relationship between shopping habits and identity. The second section analyses

in more detail the slow rate of the establishment of Ghanaian food related businesses. The third section focuses on Ghanaian restaurants and the types of food available there. The last section analyses food related aspects of large social gatherings.

The chapter shows, among other things, that the availability and presence of Ghanaian foods in markets, shops and restaurants increased slowly and relatively recently. The development of food supplies and businesses was shaped by specific characteristics of the Ghanaian migration to the UK, namely the gendered division of labour; the differences in the characteristics between early and later migrants; the lack of demand owing to the familiarity with European food; the growing pride in Ghanaian identity as their numbers increased; the growing acceptance of ethnic food within the UK, and the increase in transnational trade as an aspect of globalisation.

#### **4.1. Obtaining Ghanaian food in London – from food parcels to *kenkey* makers**

Most of the first generation migrants had settled in London after arriving in the country, with only a few living elsewhere. At first some lived with close or more distant relatives, usually with an 'auntie', some lived in student accommodation, some joined their husbands, with only a few renting a place of their own after arrival. Most made the journey alone, and only a few arrived with family or dependents, one of these was a political refugee family. Informants lived in various neighbourhoods of the metropolis, but not in southwest London. Most of them lived within 15 kilometres of the city centre (within zones 3-4); a few lived in the suburbs, typically in owner-occupied housing.

### 4.1.1. Slow increase in familiar food

Ghanaians who arrived in the UK in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, indicated that at that time Ghanaian foodstuffs were scarce. The only time they obtained them was when a friend or relative brought some over from Ghana, or they received a food parcel by post. This did not happen frequently, and it was clearly an emotional occasion.

When somebody's coming and they bring you a tube of yam you're blessed. You know. And you treasure it. And that's when you have a decent Ghanaian meal. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 469

A few were lucky in that they had a 'transnational link', i.e. a relative who travelled regularly to this country mainly due to do business. John had an uncle who was involved in the mineral trade between Ghana and Britain:

So I always had a supply of yam or something, he used to come either once a week or twice a week, so I always had something sent me from home. ... So for that reason ... whereas others didn't have yam I would have a yam at least. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 220

Typical Ghanaian ingredients, or cooked food, generally prepared by women and often brought by them, linked close family members separated by thousands of kilometres.

But then my sister used to work as an air hostess, Ghana Air hostess<sup>65</sup>. ... So she used to bring me foodstuffs. Yes, so if I was short of palm oil my mother would send her with foodstuffs for me. And dried fish and little bits and pieces. ... You can hardly see African food in this country. ... And when you see, then they're *very expensive*, and yam. So you know since I came it was really difficult. ... And funnily enough sometimes she would prepare stew, maybe spinach or things like snails that is in the stew or something like that that I don't get here - and she would bring it over you know. Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pgs 22, 75

In London, the food from Ghana acted as a means of bringing friends together and reinforcing their identities as Ghanaians or Africans:

Because of food, when my sister used to come a lot, most of my friends liked to come round because they know 'we'll get some African food.' And you know even if you give them a small slice of yam they appreciate it because they don't get any to buy. Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 61

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<sup>65</sup> Frances' sister came at least once a month for many years until she got married in Ghana and had children.

None of the informants emphasized their tribal identities when speaking about food in the past in London.

In the early 1970s, the only place where one could obtain some Ghanaian or African ingredients was Kilburn (north London) and possibly Brixton market (south London), albeit at great expense, so most would go without.

Other migration flows to the UK benefited Ghanaians in their quest for familiar foodstuffs. The number of West Indian migrants in the UK exceeded that of West Africans significantly, and Caribbean favourite foodstuffs had already found their way to London markets (Driver, 1983: 76), some of which were used by Ghanaians, although to a limited extent:

And the green bananas because that was what the West Indians were used to and that's what's in the market mostly. So you buy potatoes and mix it with green banana. And you never used to have green bananas. In Ghana we don't eat green bananas. ... And then the West Indians have coco yam so when you visit some of the West Indian shops you find coco yam. So you buy. But they're very expensive. Very very expensive. So we hardly buy them. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pgs 469, 497

After the influx of Asians from Uganda and Kenya in 1972/3, the availability of other tropical produce improved further, for example chilli peppers, which were readily accepted by Ghanaians.

The availability of African foodstuffs gradually improved in the early 1980s, but mainly in the two aforementioned places.

I think when she [mother] was still coming [to visit], and she's bringing them, I stopped her from bringing them, because I used to tell her 'Why carry all of that I could get it here.' I even wrote to my mother, so when she came on holidays in 83? 84 yes, and I took her to Brixton market and she said 'oh you've got everything here' I say 'yes, that's why I don't want you to send any more food' you know. So there was a lot of food in the market to buy, and not expensive. Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 75

By the late 1980s, stores selling Ghanaian or African foodstuffs opened up also in other neighbourhoods but they were still relatively few and far between (Balham, Deptford, Eastham, Harlsden, Clapton and Cricklewood). Three of the seven stores I was able to involve in the study were established around this time.

**Table 4.1.** Basic characteristics of food stores involved in the study.

Name	Location in London	Year established	Ethnicity of shopkeeper	Gender of informant
Thess Tropical	Balham (south)	1986	Kwahu	M
Enso Nyame Ye Minimarket	Plaistow (east)	1987	Fanti	F
Kumasi Market	Brixton (south)	1989	Ashanti	M
Kumasi Central Market	Tottenham (north)	1994	Ashanti	F
Amma Continental	Leyton (northeast)	1995	Kwahu	F
Asafo	Burnt Oak (north)	1996	Ewe	M
Ashanti Grocery	Tottenham (north)	1996	Ashanti	M & F

Informants who arrived during this period and lived near these areas remembered that everything was available, especially in Brixton. In other parts of London availability wasn't yet so good and prices were still high.

In terms of food there were very few places to buy Ghanaian food. I remember when I was pregnant with Ella [around 1989] I had a craving for some bushmeat. We went all the way to Kilburn, they said there was a shop, Charlie .. Uncle Charlie or something shop in Kilburn, who might have some. They didn't have any. There weren't any shops in southeast. The only other place was Brixton. (One way or the other) we couldn't go to Brixton. And he didn't have it. And I was really upset [laughs]. There were very few shops, they were very expensive too. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 452

Clearly, at this point in time, Ghanaians did not share the same views about the availability of, and access to, Ghanaian or African foodstuffs in London, partly indicating that not all Ghanaians were settling in the same localities.

Some of the Ghanaian stores were the only 'ethnic' store in that particular location, whereas others were part of a number of ethnic stores, including other Ghanaian ones<sup>66</sup>. The other ethnic stores were mainly run by Indians, Pakistanis and East African Asians who, by the late 1980s, were well established in ethnic food businesses, and had started catering for the tastes of other migrant groups

<sup>66</sup> Other typical Ghanaian businesses included music and video stores, although still few in number, and hairdressing salons.

as well. For example, they stocked foodstuffs familiar to West Africans, such as yam and plantains. West Indians and other West Africans, especially Nigerians, were opening up stores too, albeit on a much smaller scale, improving further the availability of tropical produce.

Ten years ago [i.e. 1989] then all these places started coming up. Harlsden you get them and Clapton you know. So many places now and there's so many African shops everywhere. So life is very very easy now. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 461

Evelyn (hhl) remembered that by the late 1980s it was possible to obtain foodstuffs such as plantain and sweet potatoes in mainstream supermarkets as well.

In the late 1980s, the first Ghanaian eating places were launched (see Table 4.2 for restaurants involved in the study). The first one to open in 1987 was a takeaway selling *kenkey* and fish, a staple food of the people of southern Ghana, generally associated with the Gas and the Fantis. The second one established a year later was a relatively large restaurant next to a Ghanaian food store in the northwest of town. However, the real surge in Ghanaian business establishments did not occur until the mid 1990s and thereafter. This was evident in the increasing number of advertisements for stores and restaurants in *Ghana Review International* after it was first published in 1994<sup>67</sup>. Between 1995 and 2000, approximately 17 new eating places were opened up (GRI May 2000, p. 33).

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<sup>67</sup> For example, there were 17 small advertisements of shops selling Ghanaian foods in February 2001 issue of GRI (no. 77).



**Table 4.2.** Basic characteristics of restaurants involved in the study.

Restaurant	Location	Year of establishment	Ethnicity of proprietor/s	Gender of informant
Kenkey African shop	Clapham J (SW)	1987	Ada	M
Oasis	Cricklewood (NW)	1988	Ashanti	M
Afrikico	Hackney (E)	1995	-	-
Ahenfie	Tottenham (N)	1995	Fanti & Ashanti	F & M
Lomnava	Tottenham (N)	1997	Ashanti & Ewe	M
Golden Stool	Tottenham (N)	1998	Ashanti	M

Most informants shared the view that by the late 1990s all Ghanaian food items were obtainable in London with relative ease. It was so good that many had stopped bringing food with them when they returned from a visit to Ghana.

These days they go to Ghana and they come [laughs] with *nothing*, because there's everything here, there's *everything here to buy*. It's expensive even to *buy* and *weigh* and *bring* it. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 106

Someone maintained that the availability was so good that Ghanaians now had no reason for returning to Ghana, underlining the importance of familiar food for the wellbeing of migrants.

Appendix D contains a description of the various foodstuffs and other items available in Ghanaian stores and their origin. What is notable is that apart from fresh produce, which was imported directly from Ghana or other West African countries, the stores stocked considerable amounts of canned goods as well, the majority of provisions being the same brand as those sold in Ghana<sup>68</sup> (e.g. Birds custard powder, Horlicks, Milo [a malted cocoa drink] and Ovaltine). Although shops normally obtained these products locally, all of them (including other processed foods) feature strongly in urban Ghanaian food culture and many of

<sup>68</sup> Consumer-ready food products on the Ghanaian market are mainly from the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. ([www.tradeport.org/ts/countries/ghana/fdmrkt.html](http://www.tradeport.org/ts/countries/ghana/fdmrkt.html), accessed 13.02.02)

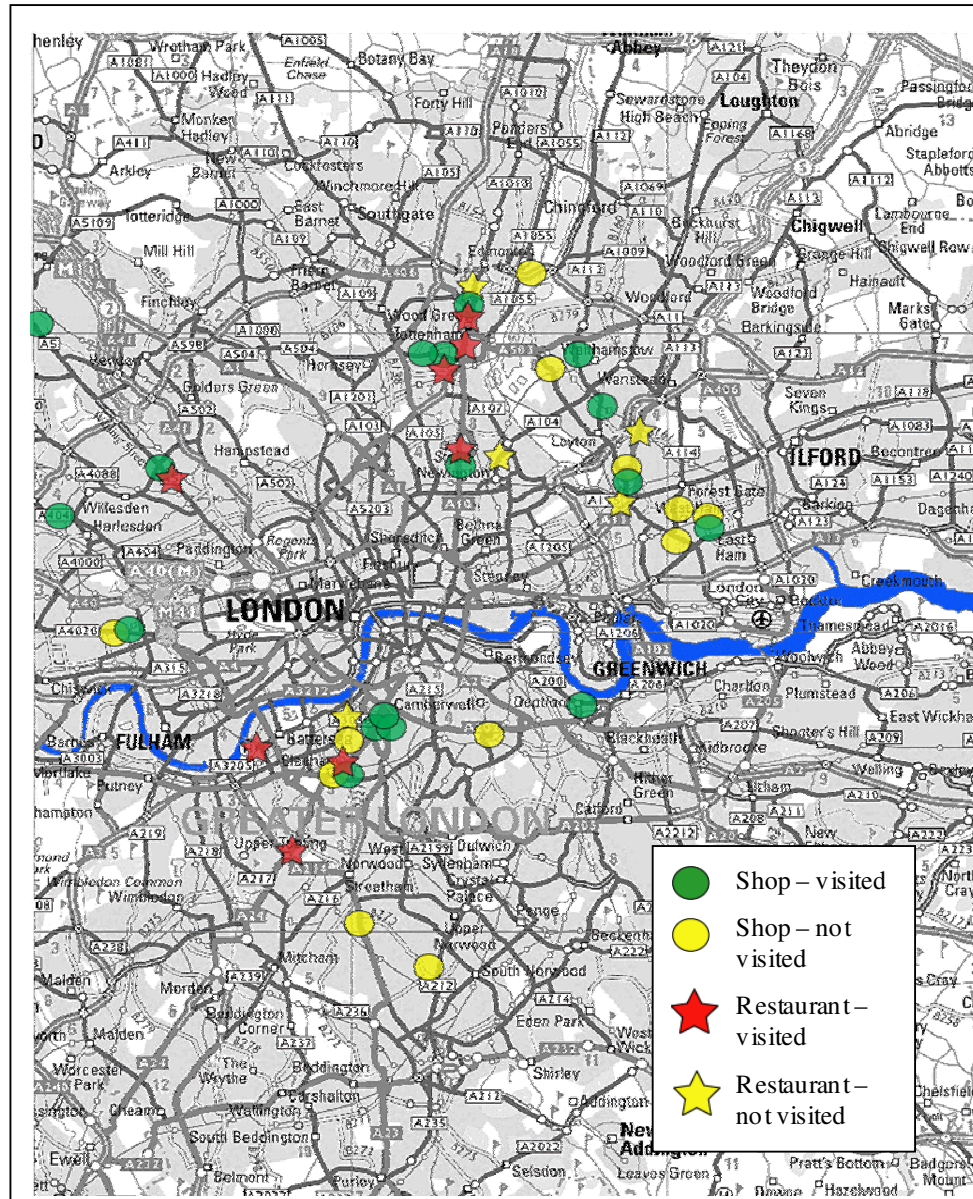
them can be seen as 'relics' of British colonial rule (Goody, 1982). One of the most bizarre imports I noted was margarine produced in Ghana.

Furthermore, apart from providing a taste of home, food stores presented an important means for Ghanaians to keep in touch with relatives and friends at home, and to keep up-to-date with local, Ghanaian, news and culture. They stocked non-edible goods such as international calling cards, Ghanaian newspapers and magazines, CDs and videos, along with hair and beauty products and utensils commonly used in food preparation in Ghana. A few places acted as agents for money transfer companies enabling Ghanaians to send remittances back home<sup>69</sup>.

Map 4.1 presents the stores and eating places that were involved in the study as well as other places that I was aware of and had visited. The clustering of the food related businesses in certain areas of London is quite clear, which reflects the nature of migrant networks and their channelling and selectivity mechanisms (Gurak & Caces, 1992). Most of the businesses were in areas with a higher concentration of Ghanaians (e.g. Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth, parts of Hackney and Haringey) (Storkey & Lewis, 1996). This follows the tendency for migrant and ethnic minority communities to establish businesses "in areas with a high concentration of their co-ethnic population that serve co-ethnic needs and operate by employing co-ethnic labour." (Basu, 2002: 151) It was apparent that areas with Ghanaian stores and restaurants attracted newcomers who settled in their vicinity, while those who had migrated in the early years were better integrated in the mainstream society living further away from these particular areas. However, there were also a few businesses in other neighbourhoods indicating that the Ghanaian community was relatively widespread.

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<sup>69</sup> As with several other migrant and ethnic minority communities, it was the duty and obligation of Ghanaians to provide for relatives back home.



**Map 4.1.** Ghanaian food stores and restaurants in London.

#### 4.1.2. Informal trading

What the above map does not reveal is the informal trade in Ghanaian foodstuffs in London, the magnitude of which is quite significant but difficult to tap in to. Apart from the shops and eating places, there were other means of buying Ghanaian food in London. Some of the Ghanaian traders supplying foodstuffs to stores and restaurants undertook private business as well, as the quote below highlights:

What I do is, I don't buy it from the Ghana shops. There is a lady who comes, she brings foodstuffs from Ghana, so what I do is that when she comes then she calls me. ... She brings about 50 boxes of yam, 50 boxes of kenkey, she brings bread, spinach, smoked fish, salted beef, shrimps, pepper. She brings dried ones and the fresh ones and the powdered one as well. She brings it in a container and airfreights it. She's got three shop keepers that she distributes them to. ... It's a big business. ... She leaves some at home, at her daughter's and you can go and buy it there. And she normally spends about five weeks here, when she comes. What she does is she buys old newspapers and airfreights it to Ghana as well. So it's a buy and sell business. She brings her foodstuffs, buys newspapers, airfreights it to Ghana, sells the papers, and then buys foodstuffs again. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 244

Lillian had obtained foodstuffs in this manner during the ten years she had spent in the UK. Undoubtedly, she wasn't the only one benefiting from this type of informal trading. In particular women appeared to be involved in trading food in this fashion. This is a continuation of the role of women as traders in Ghana (see section 4.2.2); what was once local and regional is now being done transnationally and is part of globalisation and the development of both economic and social transnational networks.

Furthermore, behind the four walls of Ghanaian homes, a dynamic cottage industry operated supplying shops and individuals with *kenkey* (i.e. Ga *kenkey*)<sup>70</sup> and *shito*. I was only able to scrape the surface of this informal sector. I saw *kenkey* being made in one of the shops by the female shopkeeper and shop assistants but normally stores sourced the fermented corn dough balls from

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<sup>70</sup> Kenkey made in London was usually Ga kenkey wrapped in corn sheaths. Fanti kenkey wrapped in plantain leaves and other types of kenkey were imported from Ghana.

*kenkey*-makers, who were usually women. I tried various avenues to gain access to observe a '*kenkey*-woman' at work, but in vain, although many informants knew of someone in the business<sup>71</sup>. No doubt they were afraid that I was an environmental health officer or some other official. Considering the number of shops selling *kenkey*, this cottage industry was booming in London<sup>72</sup>. Most likely it had taken off on a larger scale after the industrial production of fermented corn dough, the main ingredient of *kenkey*, was started in the UK in the 1990s and when corn sheaths that cover the dough balls became available in Ghanaian shops<sup>73</sup>.

I noticed that *kenkey* was available in some other 'ethnic' (i.e. non-Ghanaian) shops as well, indicating to the presence of Ghanaians in the area. Freshly made balls of *kenkey* in polythene bags were generally stored in thermos containers, keeping the dumplings warm for immediate consumption. In fact, none of the containers had signs on them and it took me a while to realise what they held. A number of informants, instead of buying balls of *kenkey* in shops, bought them directly from the producer. It appeared that the informal production and trade of *kenkey* in the UK is just as unregulated and unsupervised as it is in Ghana (Rocksloh-Papendieck, 1988).

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<sup>71</sup> As in Ghana, making *kenkey* was home-based and went well with family commitments. Yet as I did not speak to any *kenkey* women I can only draw on what other Ghanaians told me about them. A few informants maintained that the women who supplied them with *kenkey* only made the fermented corn dough balls as a source of side income, unlike women in Ghana for whom it was a full-time occupation (Rocksloh-Papendieck, 1988). For example, Deborah's (hhF) friend worked full-time in a hair salon. She prepared *kenkey* in a big pot on the cooker at home, and was able to produce around 100 to 150 balls which she sold for 50 pence a ball. If this is true, then it was quite a gainful side job, the tax free profits easily covering the cost of the ingredients. This explains why so many women were in the business despite the very hard work.

<sup>72</sup> See Rocksloh-Papendieck (1988) for an interesting study on the production and selling of *kenkey* in Ghana (includes an English summary).

<sup>73</sup> *Kenkey* was produced in London prior to this but most likely on a smaller scale and not for sale in shops.

### 4.1.3. Shopping and identity

Although Ghanaian food served as a means for bringing Ghanaians together in enhancing Ghanaian, or even African identities, a closer look at their shopping and consumption habits revealed that they used the food they bought, and the places they shopped in, to articulate difference and distinctiveness within the Ghanaian or African community. Food shopping revealed the shifting nature of personal identities. Indeed, the Ghanaian community seemed to be quite diversified when it came to actually buying food, despite the increased availability of all things Ghanaian/African. Food was a marker of belonging, and of difference and boundaries.

For example, when talking about the availability of food in the past and their own shopping or consumption habits, informants often referred to the habits of other Ghanaians and at the same time distinguished themselves from them. It seemed as if Ghanaians who had lived in the country for some time did not want to be associated with those who had lived here for only a short while. There were various reasons for this, such as different educational levels or motives for migration<sup>74</sup>. Food served as a marker of difference (Bourdieu, 1984).

Now go to Shepherd's Bush this Friday, go to any Indian shop this Friday, the *varieties* of food you see! People have recently come in they don't know! They think it's what has been *all the time*. I say no, it is *not*, it is *now*. Middle 80s coming to 90s that is what you see. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 886

The recent migrants did not know about the hardship earlier migrants had endured in regard to food, especially those who did not receive regular food parcels from home. Those who had arrived in the 1990s had not been confronted with the same sort of neophobia (fear of the unknown) (Fischler, 1988) as the early migrants. Recent migrants were either acquainted with European fruit and

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<sup>74</sup> A number of recent migrants are in the country illegally which is comparable to the situation in the Netherlands (Mazzucato, 2005).

vegetables whilst in Ghana, as they had become available there over the years, or they simply did not have to resort to them as the variety of African produce was so good in London.

### *Ghanaian or not?*

However, despite the increase in availability, the price of Ghanaian or West African foodstuffs had not necessarily decreased as much as one might have expected. This may be because of the increase in demand; there were more Ghanaians and other West Africans wanting the same produce. Prices varied according to location, being cheaper in north London, where there were also more ethnic food stores. Most informants appeared, however, to consider the cost of food and hence restricted the amount of Ghanaian food they purchased, for example, by buying it only when in season or in bulk.

I don't normally buy yams. Occasionally when it comes new like August the fresh yam comes and then maybe I'll go to the market and buy the box and I get it reasonably cheap. So yeah we eat it at the time. When it gets expensive I don't buy them because if I buy one small tube of yam for maybe three pounds you know I can buy a bag of potato for that. So I always think of .. it tastes the same *almost* so what's the point. So I've never been sort of that type. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 703

It's [gardeneggs] available all the time. But because it's seasonal, *here* it tends to be expensive at certain times. So when it's less expensive / tend to buy it in bulk, cook it all up and freeze it. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 585

Buying in bulk was a common habit among the informants; a few did so jointly with friends. Yet, as the above examples show, many would avoid buying foodstuffs altogether when the prices were too high. Some foods were always expensive, therefore many would go without.

Back home they have a way of smoking the fish and it tastes good. It tastes good but when they bring it over here it's too expensive. I cannot afford it, honestly. So, I don't buy it. All that I buy is maybe plantain and, you know, *kenkey* I get a friend to do it for me and that's about all for now. Evelyn (hhI, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 618

Others bought only little amounts. Nevertheless, there were others who purchased Ghanaian foods whatever the price.

Of course I know some people who would not eat any un-African, it has to be Ghanaian. I wonder how they manage. Unless they bragging they're lying. They say it as a status thing you know. 'cos you know Ghanaian food is expensive. ... I think they are boasting because they say that 'Oh I don't eat any Western food, I eat only Ghana food.' Something like a status symbol to them. But on the other hand, if they're not lying then I think they're doing very well to be able to maintain that level, not have anything else apart from Ghanaian food whilst living in this country. I think it's very expensive and very time consuming. So I wonder how they're able to do it. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 460

For example, household G didn't seem to mind paying more for Ghanaian produce. The parents in this household had been in the UK for nearly seven years and their teenaged children had only arrived very recently. When I spoke to Abby, whose English wasn't good and whose income derived from cleaning, she indicated that she would buy Ghanaian food even when the foodstuffs were out of season and hence very expensive:

I buy, I buy, a little, I like it [laughs] it's my cultural food, I can buy. Abby (hhG, Ashanti, 40+, 1993) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 125

Someone else commented that there were Ghanaians who would rather use all their wages on Ghanaian food than go without it. She then went on to say that Ghanaians were a very hard working community, indicating the well known fact that many Ghanaians had more than one job. In other words, Ghanaians had money, and even if it wasn't such a great deal, some were prepared to spend it on relatively expensive foods, hence avoiding substitutes and other European foods. A similar kind of cultural adherence was demonstrated by Sharma et al. (1999) studying British African-Caribbeans (first and second generation) living in inner-city Manchester. African-Caribbeans who adhered more to traditional foods and diet had lower incomes than those reporting a more westernized diet, but they still chose to spend more of their income on the more expensive Caribbean foods. Diner also notes how early Italian migrants in America bought expensive imported olive oil (from Italy or Argentina), despite being poor, defining it as a necessity and essential to Italian identity (Diner, 2001: 60).



When analysing the data more closely, it appeared that in two-parent households with fathers present, the tendency to buy Ghanaian foods was higher.

The Dad always buys it 'cos the children like it so, and he likes it. What will you eat, rice rice rice. Rice is too much here, so they eat rice rice rice. But you have to buy it occasionally, the Dad doesn't eat fufu, so he can't be eating rice all the time. So you have to buy this expensive yam or plantain or cocoyam or something just to balance his food a bit. So he does buy it, but so it depends on the time. Now it's coming down I think, so it's a bit cheap. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 906

Evelyn who indicated above that she never bought smoked fish, did so when her husband was still alive:

HT: In the beginning, did you?

Evelyn: I used to yeah. My husband was the homely type. He was very fussy with his food. He liked the real Ghanaian things so that's why I used to but since he died, I don't because I can do without it. The kids are not bothered. I'm not bothered so yeah. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 651-3

Similarly, Elisabeth bought Ghanaian foods only when her husband who lived in Ghana came over to London to join her on holidays:

So I don't make it a point of going shopping like she [Joyce] does on Saturdays to get all Ghanaian foodstuffs and bring it home. I don't. My habits have changed because of my family circumstances here. But when my husband comes on holidays I cook a lot of Ghanaian meals. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 197

No doubt the inclination to buy typical Ghanaian foods was facilitated by a joint income, which was lacking in single parent households, yet this revealed gender differences in consumption habits and in the perceived need for traditional foods for the wellbeing of male household heads.

Considering shopping habits, it seemed that many Ghanaians were now willing to demonstrate their ethnic identities far more openly than earlier (see section 4.2) and buying typical Ghanaian food was seen as an important means of doing so. As the informant above indicated, buying and eating Ghanaian food was possibly a matter of status, but it was not necessarily linked to high income, or high educational levels, although facilitated by the former. Some Ghanaians were using Ghanaian food as a means to attest the superiority of their own (ethnic)

identities in relation to those of other Ghanaians, or other (West) Africans, for that matter.

### *Places and identities*

Although other West African, primarily Nigerian, stores were opening up and stocking similar items to Ghanaian shops, I was told that if Ghanaians had the choice, they preferred going to Ghanaian shops. Apparently, Ghanaians did not like being taken for Nigerians, revealing a division in the West African community, despite their shared African identities.

I know people shop in Eugenia's shop because it's Ghanaian and there are certain things that they would like from there. You know. They would equally get it in the Nigerian shop but they won't want to go there. They'll go to Eugenia to buy it. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 679

The above informant, however, like many of the others partaking in the study, was prepared to buy food in any shop.

I don't go for any particular shop, the Ghanaian shops or anything. If I need peppers I look around. Where I see them I buy it there. If I go for plantain I just look for the nicest one. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 679

Gloria: But in a lot of the Asian shops around here and West Indian shops you can get Ghanaian foods.

HT: Would you actually buy from any of these shops?

Gloria: Oh so long as the price is right I don't care who sells them. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 1329

Some did not hesitate to by-pass Ghanaian ones altogether. Pauline lived near Brixton market, a hub of Ghanaian and other West African food, yet she avoided Ghanaian stalls and shops, as she thought they were more expensive than Indian and Pakistani shops. The yam and plantain she bought,

it's always from the Indian shop anyway. And the kenkey from Indian shop. 'Cos it's big. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 144

As there was an increase in choice in regard to Ghanaian shops, some paid particular attention to which one they frequented.

HT: Which ones do you go to if you buy something Ghanaian?

John: There's this one that I've just seen at Edmonton, it looks very good, and she looks clean and the food there looks well taken care of, so I'll be going there more often.

HT: All that way?

John: Yeah! if I think this place that the shop's clean and everything I'll go there, I don't care where it is, you know how far or how long it takes me to get there, I'll get there. And if things there don't look very clean, maybe next (time) I just wouldn't go there. [laughs] That's all.

HT: Are there Ghanaian shops that you wouldn't go to in London?

John: Yeah there's one on Green Lane, West Green Road that I wouldn't go.  
John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 993-1004

Cleanliness was an issue mentioned by a few other informants as well, and by doing so they were reacting like many other consumers when choosing a place to shop (Ellaway & Macintyre, 2000). By avoiding less well kept stores they were also distancing themselves from the clientele who opted to shop in such places, thus making a statement of their own difference. One of the older informants, who like John had migrated to the UK in the early years, indicated that he would never go to Brixton market, highlighting strong divisions in the black British community:

I mean I belong to a class. Where there are too many blacks I don't go there. Because they think you are one of them. ... It's too rough you see. And as a polling service officer I've got to watch where I go as well. If I go to the community I must make sure I'm invited either officially or the person is a family friend or a relation. Otherwise I wouldn't get into my car and just go to Brixton and walk about. No I wouldn't do it. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 863-72

Henry would rather order the food by phone than be seen in certain areas of London<sup>75</sup>.

Unless they bought kenkey directly from a *kenkey* maker, some Ghanaians were particular where they bought the fermented corn dough balls:

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<sup>75</sup> Apart from Henry, only one other informant mentioned ordering by phone, yet she had resorted to it while unable to shop because of health problems. Henry was not responsible for the main shopping in his household.

Fiona: Laura's [half-sister] a bit fussed about kenkey and you know shito? It's like, it's like you have to get it from a *certain* place, which is *trusted*<sup>76</sup>, some places aren't that good and you know who made it 'cos

Lisa: It might not taste so good

HT: Is this the shito or the kenkey?

Fiona: Both, really

Lisa: Yeah so you have to know where to get it really, and it's word of mouth basically and once you've found that place you stick to it. Fiona (hhC, 26, 1979) & Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 2993-3016

Freshness of *kenkey* and smoked dried fish were reasons why many Ghanaians were prepared to travel longer distances to shop.

So they will rather go out of their way to that shop because they've been given guarantee that it comes in fresh every fortnight. So they will go there. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 715

Since shops were not necessarily just round the corner from home, people were generally prepared to travel to buy the foods they wanted. In fact, most shopped around and this was facilitated by the multitude of options in London:

HT: What about where would you do your shopping? The main shopping?

Serwa: Different places. Different days. Different areas. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 258-60

Below there are two case studies of shopping habits in two households.

### **Shopping habits in two households**

#### **Case study 1 – Household H**

Pauline shops at various places in order to pay as little as possible for food. She buys tinned food in bulk from either Lidl or Netto; milk, yoghurts and bread from either Iceland or some other shop. She gets eggs from Costcutter, the local corner shop, and Ghanaian foods from Asian shops in Brixton. She buys chicken in bulk from a butcher, and sometimes loaves of bread in bulk, when they are on offer, and freezes them. She doesn't buy fruit because her daughter eats it too quickly. Instead she buys tinned fruit. She sends her daughter to buy things from Iceland and Costcutter which are just over the road. She sometimes goes shopping with her sister who has a car. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987)

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<sup>76</sup> Trust appears also to be an issue in cooked food sold by the way side in Ghana: "For canned meat or fish is no more expensive than the local product and for the visitor they appear safer, providing a protection against being poisoned by mystical or other means. Travellers are often afraid at first of local foods and prefer to subsist on bread and sardines." (Goody & Goody, 1995: 10)

### Case study 2 – Household J

In hhJ, Caroline and John have different shopping habits. When John is home, he will do most of the shopping in Sainsbury and Lidl (every fortnight), and then buy African/Ghanaian produce, and things like 20 kg rice sacks, in other shops, possibly Ghanaian or Indian. As he drives, he can choose to shop in more distant stores, and also to buy in bulk. When he is in Ghana or away, as happened during the study period, Caroline has to do the shopping. She does not drive, and she thinks carefully where she can buy things cheaply. She is prepared to travel a distance to buy orange juice and tinned tomatoes from Lidl. She prefers to buy fruit and vegetables from the market, again for financial reasons. Because she can only carry a limited amount, she shops nearly every day. She thinks her husband spends too much on Ghanaian and other exotic food (e.g. fruit). Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) & John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965)

Both examples highlight how well Ghanaians knew their locality and where to find a bargain. In the first case, income may have been an issue, as Pauline was a single mother with a part-time job. In the second one, the household income was higher. Apart from underlining the significance of a car for shopping habits, the cases also address the issue of gender differences. Due to the limited number of two-parent households that took part in the study it is difficult to say anything conclusive on this matter. Although women were evidently in charge of shopping in most of the two-parent households, in some, men helped by taking them shopping in the car. This reflects shopping habits in the general population, studies showing that in dual earner households, men's involvement might be restricted to helping women with the task, not sharing it on an equal basis (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Marshall & Anderson, 2000; Sidenvall et al., 2001). Yet in household J, John did the shopping alone most of the time.

Caroline pointed out another possible source of gender differences in shopping habits: the independent financial resources and responsibilities of spouses, an issue not pursued further in this study, but discussed by Goody and Groothues (1979).

When I follow him and we go [shopping] I save him money instead. Like I said I shop like a woman [laughs] not a man [laughs]. When you send a man shopping let him use his own money, he'll buy everything. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 2660-4

Although Caroline did not go out to work and have an income of her own, which was unlike most other women in the study, she shopped as if the money was her own. In a way, both examples highlight the importance Ghanaian women pay to food and eating, as they are willing to spend the time procuring food.

Shopping for food in several shops and places was, I was told, a Ghanaian or African trait<sup>77</sup>:

Lisa: We just do all our shop- our groceries in one place, Tesco's.

Fiona: Which is very un-Ghanaian as well (I suppose) because you know like I think really an African - or I'm African - because Africans they'll buy their *fish* from a certain place - even here like in England - buy the fish from a certain place buy the chicken from a certain place and vegetables from a certain place even the rice they'll buy it from different place, and just for basics they'll go just like Tesco's or Sainsbury's. That's where they get their tins and stuff but ehm their shopping their shopping places is quite is quite intricate. Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) & Fiona (hhC, 26, 1979) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 2612

Although many informants fitted this description, not everyone did. Lisa (hhC, 30) and Fiona (hhC, 26) had migrated to the UK as children and attended boarding school here, so their habits differed in many respects to the other informants. Although they identified themselves as Ghanaians or British Ghanaians, their habits were possibly akin to that of other British people for whom convenience was high up in the selection criteria of stores (Calnan & Cant, 1990; Ellaway & Macintyre, 2000). Born in Britain, Emeffa (hhM, 21) restricted her shopping to mainly one place. Despite living with her mother, she led a very different, independent, life in regard to food and eating habits. Gladys (hhN) and Evelyn (hhI) were two of those from the older generation who generally shopped in one supermarket, indicating transformed habits and identities, but even they bought Ghanaian foodstuffs in Ghanaian or other ethnic shops, and meat or chicken from the butchers:

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<sup>77</sup> Miller refers to some preliminary research carried out in London among Ghanaian traders, who saw that their own ways of shopping and bargaining were West African and a point of contrast with the behaviour of English shoppers (Miller et al., 1998). Lack of queuing as well as picking things needed, and not browsing and choosing on site, were seen as characteristic of West African shopping habits.

We eat a lot of Western food, British food. So I go to Safeway for almost (everything). But if I need chicken I won't buy it from Safeway because I know it's cheaper in Peckham<sup>78</sup>. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 201

One obvious reason for shopping around was to get a bargain, and this did not appear to be a trait of only poorer households. Shopping around was not restricted to typically African produce but also other foods. Without going into detail on this matter, other important expenses such as remittances (see Henry & Mohan, 2003; Mazzucato, 2005), accentuated the need for low-cost food. For many Ghanaians in London, food, as well as housing, was low down on their list of priorities. The construction of a house in Ghana is a top priority of many Ghanaians in the diaspora, with the establishment of a business and contribution to funeral costs of close relatives being further major expenses for migrants (Mazzucato, 2005)<sup>79</sup>. Mazzucato lists other non-remittance expenditure for Ghanaians in the Netherlands, which are similar to the ones I noticed in London. These included fees for education, as well as other more visible status symbols such as car ownership, electrical appliances, fashionable 'traditional' attires for functions, special African hairdos, and the organisation of functions. Konadu-Agyemang points out that not only remittances but also the number of 'gadgets' taken home on return migration in subsequent years, are often the "criteria by which the families and community judge the success or failure of a migrant." (Konadu-Agyemang, 1999: 412). Financial pressures in London reflected also the reluctance to set up food-related businesses which I will address in the next section.

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<sup>78</sup> Another reason for buying chicken from a butchers was that Ghanaians preferred buying 'boilers' which were more suitable for Ghanaian soups than roasting chickens.

<sup>79</sup> Mazzucato's list includes large payments made to obtain legal status in the country (Mazzucato, 2005). This would also be relevant for Ghanaians staying illegally in the UK.

## 4.2. Ghanaians in the food and catering trade

In comparison to many other migrant and ethnic minority groups, Ghanaians, as well as other West Africans, were slow in establishing food-related businesses in London. This was due to several factors: the particular characteristics of Ghanaian migration, and sociocultural and socioeconomic factors<sup>80</sup>. The gendered division of labour mentioned by Driver (1983) may indeed be one of the main reasons, but it is embedded in a multitude of other factors that need considering.

### 4.2.1. Early years – migration for personal advancement

Unlike many other migrant groups who quickly became involved in the food and catering trade once settled in the country (Driver, 1983), Ghanaians, like most other West Africans (Craven, 1968), had other aspirations in the early years. They were not part of a mass chain migration, and entered the UK initially to study<sup>81</sup>. Most were men and came from relatively privileged backgrounds. After achieving their academic or vocational goals, they returned home to take up some respectable occupation. This encouraged others to follow in their path. While studying in the UK, many worked to supplement their income, but did not venture into business, as they had no intention of settling in the UK. One could say they lacked the propensity for entrepreneurship that characterised so many other migrant and ethnic minority groups (e.g. Jews and East African Asians) (Basu, 2002: 151). Or, as one of the informants put it,

you see Ghanaians were not very business conscious at that particular time.  
James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 2085

<sup>80</sup> The standpoint here can only be generalised to other West Africans in the UK, not West Indians whose migration pattern to the UK historically differs significantly to that of West Africans.

<sup>81</sup> In a survey carried out in 1970 of all West African families living in selected enumeration districts in four inner London boroughs, 96% of the men out of the total of 296 families said they had come to England in order to obtain professional or technical qualifications (Goody & Groothues, 1977). Most informants in the present study who migrated in the early years came for academic qualifications, although a few joined their families or spouses who were already here.



As the political and economic situation degenerated in Ghana in the 1970s and employment opportunities worsened, many of those who migrated to study or, if they were already qualified in Ghana, for better job opportunities, decided to stay on longer in the UK. As the state of affairs didn't improve back home, their stay was again prolonged and eventually became permanent. Another reason for a drawn out stay for students was financial difficulties that compelled them to work, often full-time, even during term time. Many had first to obtain 'O' and 'A' levels to satisfy matriculation requirements before they could begin the course they had chosen (Goody & Groothues, 1977: 164). Nevertheless, in their minds they were still planning to go home and didn't want to become involved in setting up a business, which would mean more commitment and possibly higher expenses in this country.

One of the restaurant owners I interviewed claimed that Ghanaians at the time weren't enterprising; they were "laid back" and "reserved". The emphasis was on personal academic and professional development, and on earning money. Many wanted to build a house in Ghana to return to, and a great number were also compelled to help relatives back home. The pressure to earn money was high. The general attitude was "each for himself and God for all", as another restaurant owner explained. This way of thinking extended even to other relatives in London, as noticed by Goody and Groothues:

While there were quite frequent visits, unless these relatives were living close by there was very little exchange of services. Although this is contrary to the West African ethic of kinship solidarity, it is perhaps hardly surprising in view of the full and complex lives which both men and women lead here. (Goody & Groothues, 1977: 175-6)

In comparison, the outstanding business acumen of the Chinese migrants in the catering trade was seen as being down to ethnic solidarity and the custom that every member of the family is given the responsibility to ensure that the interests

of the family unit are more important than the needs of individual members (Chan, 2002: 178).

#### **4.2.2. The role of gender**

The number of female Ghanaian migrants in the UK soon levelled with that of males<sup>82</sup>, a phenomenon unlike many other migrant groups. Some joined their husbands, but a significant proportion came independently to train and then married here<sup>83</sup> (Goody & Groothues, 1977; Stapleton, 1978a). A great number of women had similar ambitions to the men in regard to further education and professional or technical qualifications<sup>84</sup> (Goody & Groothues, 1977: 167). They were driven partly by the fact that economic independence is the norm or aim for Ghanaian women, especially those from the matrilineal Akan group. If their husbands hadn't yet completed their studies, or worked part-time while studying, many wives had to make substantial contributions to the family income by finding work outside the home (Goody & Groothues, 1977). As an example, Grace (hhE) explained how she had to work full-time to support her student husband after arriving in the country in 1965. She had had plans to study as well, but it was too difficult to combine with work and having children, two of whom had to be given to foster parents because of economic hardship and lack of space. One of them grew up with foster parents until she was in her mid-teens while the other was sent back to Ghana at the age of two and did not return until she was 16. Grace finally attended a course in catering six years into her stay in the UK. As Goody and Groothues point out

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<sup>82</sup> According to official figures, the Ghanaian-born population in the UK in 1971 was 6385 males and 4835 females; in 1981 these figures were 8918 and 7969, respectively (Daley, 1996).

<sup>83</sup> Ghanaian male and female migrants often possessed equal levels of education (Brydon, 1992).

<sup>84</sup> Goody and Groothues' survey of 296 Ghanaian and Nigerian women revealed that about 20% planned to enter a profession, nearly always nursing; another 20% were thinking of secretarial work, while a further 20% intended to set up a business (Goody & Groothues, 1979: 167). The last group of women were attending dressmaking, hairdressing, catering and domestic science courses.

although women's economic roles vary from one society to another [in West Africa], in the societies of the coast and forest belt which send migrants to England, a woman assumes that she will work in addition to looking after the household and the children. The question is not *whether* she will work, but at what? (Goody & Groothues, 1977: 166-7)

Indeed, my research indicated, it was women who were the forerunners in establishing market stalls and shops selling Ghanaian food in London<sup>85</sup>. Out of the seven retail outlets in the study all but one were originally established by women, although in a few cases, sons had taken over the management. Women were also the driving force behind most of the restaurants in London, although their husbands were the managers. In most venues women were the main chefs and all kitchen staff was female. In one of the restaurants where I conducted fieldwork, a man had, nevertheless, been employed to prepare *kyinkyinga* at the weekend. This corresponded with the situation in Ghana where the handling and preparation of meat for grilling has been seen as the domain of men<sup>86</sup>.

The situation in London reflected the gendered division of labour in Ghanaian society and the economy: it is women who have, almost exclusively, been responsible for selling and preparing food in Ghana<sup>87</sup>, which is similar to other parts of West Africa (Chamlee-Wright, 1997; Clark, 1994; Lewis, 1976; Robertson, 1976). While men became involved through the influence of the British in the import-export trade, internal trade has remained primarily a female occupation.

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<sup>85</sup> Ghanaian women already had strong trade links with the UK, as a number of businesswomen in Ghana travelled regularly to the UK to purchase various goods to sell in Ghana. "Women with no education at all may be trading on such a scale that they regularly fly to Europe on business." (Stapleton, 1978a: 26)

<sup>86</sup> Grilling meat in the form of a 'kebab' is a relatively new tradition in Ghana, a practice brought to Ghana most likely by the Hausa who had adopted the Arabic style of grilling meat (Ikpe, 1994: 89).

<sup>87</sup> Traditionally, an Ashanti wife was also expected to cultivate a farm in which the basic vegetables, including staples, were grown (Goody & Groothues, 1979: 81). A good husband provided meat or fish for the soup.

In the West African context, market trading has long been considered women's work, and this role only became more entrenched in the colonial period. ... Today, anywhere from 70 to 83 percent of market trading in the southern urban areas is conducted by women ... Women typically sell local food staples such as yam, cocoyam, cassava, and plantain, as well as secondary food crops such as tomatoes, rice, onions, bananas, and oranges. ... Women also sell dry goods and other provisions, beads and jewellery, fresh meat and dried fish, and prepared foods such as *kenkey*, small meat pies, and bakery items. (Chamlee-Wright, 1997: 16)

Women have also been responsible for preparing and providing cooked food for sale, whether hawking it in the streets (Mensah et al., 2002) or selling it in 'chop bars', as the small (make-shift) traditional eating places are called in Ghana<sup>88</sup>. Moreover, cooking has strong sexual connotations in the Ghanaian context (see chapter 6), and according to Clark this extends to chop bars which serve similar heavy meals to those at home. The majority of the customers are single men and travellers, such as truck drivers (Clark, 1994). As regards the women running the place,

although many are perfectly respectable, the suspicion persists that the proprietor or her assistant provides sexual services along with the evening meal, as a wife does. (Clark, 1994: 348)

The slow pick up of business in London can therefore be explained partly by the fact that in the early years of migration, the majority of Ghanaians who came to the UK were men (Stapleton, 1978a), who probably had limited culinary skills and abilities. Establishing a grocery shop or a restaurant wouldn't have been on their minds, or their first choice of business. A well-educated Ghanaian man would not have wanted to be seen engaged in an activity, which was so clearly feminised in Ghana.

The sexual connotation of cooking clarifies further why setting up Ghanaian eating places was such a slow process. Only women could prepare 'chop bar meals', but they couldn't pursue the business on their own: they needed their husbands to manage the place to safeguard their reputation. Unsurprisingly,

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<sup>88</sup> Hotels with restaurants following Western style of catering and offering 'European cuisine' may have employed male staff (Goody, 1982), but these were frequented by only a fraction of the population on formal occasions.

many of the men had other jobs or professions too, as the catering trade – one could call the restaurants ‘formal chop bars’ – was a feminised area.

#### **4.2.3. Practical, socioeconomic, constraints**

The reasons for the delay in establishing stores and restaurants in London selling Ghanaian food are, nevertheless, more complex than this. Some obvious constraints in the early years were related to less developed international transport and higher freight costs than today<sup>89</sup>. The political and economic climate, as well as the logistics of production and transport of goods in Ghana for large-scale exportation into the diaspora weren’t necessarily favourable either. Conditions did not improve until after 1983, a year in which food shortages were common place in Ghana and there were no consumer goods for sale. Subsequently, Ghana underwent structural reforms and opportunities for trading increased substantially, goods becoming widely available (Brydon, 1992).

Furthermore, as one of my other informants indicated – an entrepreneur himself – it wasn’t easy for an African to obtain a bank loan for establishing a business or a place to rent in the UK at that time. Although I did not discuss financial matters further, there is evidence that black people in Britain have faced, and still face, difficulties in securing suitable finance for their business ventures (Barrett, 1999). Barrett’s (1999) study not only shows that African-Caribbean individuals have experienced greater problems in obtaining bank loans than their white counterparts, but that gender matters too, African-Caribbean women encountering more problems than men. This reflects the experience of one of my female key informants who had thought of opening up a salad bar selling ethnic foods alongside Ghanaian and Indian snack type foods:

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<sup>89</sup> Nowadays, as a report on marketing of tropical commodities states, “it costs more per pound to send a lorry full of apples from Taunton to London (150 miles) than it does to send apples by sea from Mombassa to London (7000 miles)”. (Robbins, 1995)

If one goes to a bank manager to get money to do purely this it's not going to be easy. Because they think about the numbers, would Ghanaians or Africans be prepared to spend the extra you know 50 pence cost of having the meal ready cooked. You know are we at that stage yet? It's still not ripe yet. ... So yes, the start up money is not easy to get. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 166

The external opportunity structure has been very hostile, especially in the early years, racial discrimination towards black people being widespread (Fryer, 1984) and has contributed to the delay in the establishment of Ghanaian food businesses.

#### **4.2.4. Lack of demand for Ghanaian food**

Another factor, which didn't encourage the establishment of Ghanaian or West African food stores in the UK early on, was the apparent lack of demand for the typical Ghanaian or West African food produce by the host population. The increasing demand for tropical fruits by the white British (Henderson, 1992) that was covered by supermarkets and other grocery shops, didn't extend in a similar fashion to tropical vegetables, or the starchy staples, the mainstay of Ghanaian and other (West) African cuisine. The lack of Ghanaian or African restaurants undoubtedly played a part here, as one way for the adoption of foreign foods and dishes in the host society is through ethnic restaurants. Another way is through foreign travel, and again Ghanaians (or West Africans) were in a disadvantaged position. In comparison to Indian or Chinese cuisine, or most other migrant cuisines (e.g. Italian) which developed after the Second World War in Britain, the demand for Ghanaian or African cuisine by the host population was, and still is, strikingly low.

More importantly, however, the need for Ghanaian produce or dishes by Ghanaians themselves wasn't necessarily as high as one might have expected either. Again, the excuse appears to be that they were occupied with higher matters:

At that time, you were training, you had so much on your mind that you know, you just wanted to eat and get on with you know your studies. *Now* where I'd go out of my way to invite people and make a meal for no reason, because you know I fancy to. Like *now* you know I can take a day off specially, just to cook for people to come and eat, you know. And it wasn't like that in those days, you were studying so you had too much on your mind to worry whether you were eating Ghanaian food or not. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 2060

Furthermore, many of those who migrated in the early years were already acquainted with foodstuffs of the former colonial rulers before migrating, especially through boarding school, and focused on those foods once in the UK.

So back in 1970s there wasn't much Ghanaian food here. And when I came, well we eat rice in Ghana, that's right, so because there was rice here, there wasn't much difference, and we were a British colony all the time, most of the provisions like tinned fruit and tin meat and all the things, the ones we saw in Ghana, were still here. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 8

As already described in the literature review, throughout the colonial period in Ghana there had been the assumption of the superiority of the white man and his civilization and this extended to the white man's food. Although this 'colonial mentality' of colonized people trying very hard to assimilate the customs of the colonial power and looking down on their own customs (Ikpe, 1994: 85) had subsided to a degree by the time the informants of this study grew up, there were signs of it in some families. A few individuals recalled how their fathers had been the only ones who enjoyed European food occasionally and used cutlery for typically Ghanaian food; they were even described as being fussy in their attitude towards food and culinary etiquette. Migrating to the UK enabled many to indulge in foods that previously were limited to the elite and to those in a higher social position.

We have bacon in Ghana but it was an expensive food, it was imported, so there wasn't a lot of it, and I mean I had bacon, baked beans, and everything that you know was being served, so it was a case of you know thinking 'oh I'm *now* having things I couldn't have or things that were not frequent.' I don't know about other people but it wasn't a shock to my system, I just felt that things that I couldn't have in Ghana are now abundantly available. So it wasn't too traumatic a change. It was like thinking 'oh all these expensive things are here and I'm having free' [laughs] well out of my pay but it's free, I can have it every day! Bacon every day! So it's a, you know, if you could call it, it was a change for the better so to say. Because you know if you don't know any better you think it's things you can't afford, now that you can afford it it's always we always think that is better. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1923

In other words, many Ghanaians once in the UK were comfortable eating some European foods, and possibly did so as a marker of advancement or improvement. In this respect they differed from other migrant groups, such as the Chinese or Indians, who appeared to make every effort to maintain their original food habits (Chan, 2002; Basu, 2002). The habits of Ghanaians resembled to a degree those of early Italian migrants in America who, as Diner describes, “built their lives and diets around the consumption of foods that were familiar but had been inaccessible, since they had been the preserve of the elite back home.” (Diner, 2001: 58)

Furthermore, those Ghanaians who migrated early, found substitutes for foods they didn't want to go without, such as *fufu* or *banku* or *nkontomire* leaves, and became so accustomed to them that many didn't revert to the original products once they became available (see chapter 5). Ghanaians helped each other to cope without the real ingredients, the spread of this knowledge occurring, as Serwa put it,

just by word of mouth. Because *everybody* that comes to this country usually knows somebody somewhere. So they teach you the ropes. So to say they take you in hand and say this is what we do and this is what you do. And then you pick up from there. But you know I haven't known anybody to be given a cook book and say these are the substitutes. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 305-13

Lack of demand for restaurants was further accentuated by the fact that in the early years, the habit of dining out in the evenings and at weekends was not part of Ghanaian food culture in Ghana, although buying food in the streets and eating in traditional chop bars was widespread. In the past, as one of my key informants explained, due to the intricate nature of cooking, a loving couple would scarcely go to a restaurant. They would eat the food prepared by the wife. If a married couple went to a restaurant, people would query the husband as to whether his wife could cook, or not. If a wife couldn't cook or didn't learn to cook her marriage would suffer. Indeed, none of my informants from that time period remembered



dining out while still living in Ghana. If they had, they would have most likely been confronted with non-Ghanaian food:

for formal occasions, defined in the context of the new life, people will repair to restaurants, the more elaborate of which will offer 'European cuisine' though some will serve Ghanaian food as well. Formal occasions require formal food, which tends to be defined as European. (Goody, 1982: 178)

This was unlike the situation among, for example, the Chinese in London or the Vietnamese in Australia (Thomas, 2004), who were already used to eating out in their respective home countries. According to Goody, China has always been a restaurant culture *par excellence*, with restaurants coming in all shapes and sizes (Goody, 1998: 164).

#### **4.2.5. Changing demand and attitudes by Ghanaians**

The demand for Ghanaian food in the UK grew with the rise in the number of Ghanaians in the country and with the realisation that the new home was indeed a permanent one for a large proportion of them. No longer was it only relatively wealthy Ghanaians who were migrating to this country. Increasing numbers were from less wealthy backgrounds, the main motive for migration no longer being solely for education. The upheavals in Ghana in the 1970s and early 1980s generated a fair number of political refugees, but increasingly people were arriving to find work, with or without qualifications, legally or illegally (Brydon, 1992).

They are coming here to make money, so whether they have been to school or not is immaterial. They just come here, make as much money as they can and go home. Or send it home, stay here, send the money home. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 146

Table 4.3 shows the increase in numbers of the Ghanaian-born population in the UK between 1971 and 2001. It depicts the official figures and does not account for undocumented migrants or Ghanaians avoiding the census.

**Table 4.3.** Ghana-born population in the UK 1971-2001 (Daley, 1996; Office for National Statistics).

	1971	1981	1991	2001
<b>Males</b>	6 385	8 918	16 805	26 691
<b>Females</b>	4 835	7 969	15 867	28 846
<b>Total</b>	11 215	16 887	32 672	55 537

With the increase in the size of the Ghanaian (and other black African and Caribbean) community in London, came a change in attitudes. Without going into further detail about the various causes for this change, the shift in attitudes was evident in various spheres of Ghanaian culture in London, as the following quote highlights:

Oh yes a great change yeah. Even the way we dress. When we came here we used to wear attires, just like her [Western] dress is like that, but nowadays, I'll go out with my traditional clothing .. all the time yeah, without looking eh people looking at you. Yeah I wear a lot of traditional, for instance tomorrow when we go dancing I'll put on my traditional clothing, but back in 1972 it was .. you can hardly see anybody wearing. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 22

This newly found confidence and pride extended to food as well. Just as Ghanaians started identifying themselves openly as Ghanaians, Ghanaian food in its original form became the number one choice. It started appearing on buffet tables at larger social gatherings:

Gladys: Before, the trend was towards the European or the British or Europeanised Ghanaian food, whatever, and then the heavy Ghanaian food like the kenkey 'oh there's some in the back there if you want.' They are never displayed. Now they are all the ones sitting there from plantain red and green to cassava, fried cassava and yam.

HT: So you've been able to observe the change?

Gladys: I suppose it's availability too, things are more easily available and cheaper. I think it's also confidence, people feel very confident to display their culture. People are now culturally aware.

HT: And you think that wasn't before?

Gladys: No I don't think that was before. It could also be a combination of other things. ... Before people were bit embarrassed or they weren't very confident to display their own traditional dishes. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 71-79

Concurrent changes in attitudes and practices in Ghana were no doubt playing a part as well. For example, eating out had become a more common feature of urban life Ghana.

The change in attitudes in the Ghanaian community in Britain was also affecting the propensity of men to become entrepreneurs in spheres traditionally occupied by women. Some men with degrees took up this option because of difficulties in finding suitable employment in their own field for various reasons, including discrimination (Basu, 2002). In fact, Black African men were affected by unemployment more than women (Barrett et al., 2001).

Businesses were finally set up in greater numbers. I have only scanty information on the background of the storekeepers<sup>90</sup>, yet all the restaurant managers I interviewed had been in the country for a long time before entering the trade. Most of them had completed studies in this country and only two had actually given up working full-time in their original occupations. In other words, some managers run a restaurant in their spare time in the evenings and weekends. Only a few were qualified in business management. Warde has also noted that proprietors of small ethnic restaurants appear to lack formal training but learn the trade after arrival in the country of destination (Warde, 2000).

#### **4.2.6. Characteristics of Ghanaian food businesses**

Ghanaian food stores and restaurants were established first and foremost to cater for the needs and tastes of members of the Ghanaian community. Some restaurateurs were quite frank about it, and compared the situation with other

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<sup>90</sup> One shop was run by a married couple, although it had been the wife's idea to establish the place. In two of the older stores with male managers, their mothers had actually established and still owned the business. In a further case, the wife of the shopkeeper was in charge of the business, but at the time of the study she was in Ghana. She was a nurse by profession and his degree was in business management, but he had worked as a teacher in the past. Another female retailer had a degree in home economics.

ethnic minorities, many of whom had their own places to socialise. Ghanaians were finally doing what many migrant groups had done before them.

Immigrants in a foreign city, whether dispossessed Austrian Jews in the 1930s, or rich Japanese and Kuwaitis in the 1970s, need meeting places in London where they can talk to each other in their own languages and not have to mind the host country's manners. They hanker after dishes that their womenfolk may be too busy to bother with while they are scratching a living or raising a family under difficult circumstances. (Driver, 1983: 91)

Considering the customer profiles of the stores and restaurants as presented by the managers themselves, it was apparent that other West Africans, as well as West Indians, benefited at least to a certain extent from the Ghanaian businesses. Europeans, who weren't necessarily all white British, but were from various white ethnic groups of cosmopolitan London, featured at the bottom of the customer list of most places. Ghanaian or West African food and cuisine still remained largely a curiosity for the wider public. This is unlike most present-day Indian restaurants, the clientele of which are mainly white (Basu, 2002: 155).

Typically, Ghanaian food stores carried Ghanaian names and were small in size, often smaller than many other 'ethnic' stores nearby, such as Indian, Pakistani or Turkish shops. Many of the food products lacked names or clarifications in English. Similarly, the whole set up of restaurants – the names of the venues, low-key presentation of menus without translations or explanations of dishes, the music and modest décor – indicated that these Ghanaian businesses were part of a protected market or ethnic niche (Barrett et al., 2001), and were not even intended for the white majority. The proprietors were trying to attract co-ethnic community members by creating a sense of homeland (Basu, 2002: 154).

As is characteristic of such businesses (Basu, 2002; Driver, 1983), most of them were family businesses, relying on the support of spouses, children and other relatives, thus reducing labour costs. Although I was not certain of one restaurant, in all others, the wives of the male managers were heavily involved in

running the place and, as already indicated, they were the principal chefs in three venues. Indeed, it had been the wives' enthusiasm for cooking and catering that had been the impetus behind the ventures<sup>91</sup>. In both of the restaurants where I gained access to the kitchen, the main chefs and kitchen assistants had arrived relatively recently from Ghana, one woman having very limited knowledge of English. It was clear that they had never trained in catering but had learnt the job while growing up. In one of the venues, the proprietor's niece was in charge although she had come over from Ghana on a long 'holiday' getting a break from her real job as a professional cameraman for the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.

One interesting feature of many Ghanaian restaurants was the omnipotent television, which didn't seem to disturb the customers. I have noticed that TV plays a strong part in the entertainment of guests in Ghanaian culture, both in Ghana and the diaspora. It is considered polite to switch it on when receiving visitors, so that they won't feel bored, or uncomfortable should long silences in discussion occur. The presence of the TV in Ghanaian restaurants made the place a home away from home, where Ghanaians could eat cherished food in a homely manner. To what extent this pleasure would be reduced, if the venue started attracting a great number of white customers eating with cutlery, remains unclear. For eating hot (i.e. physically hot) *banku* and slippery okro soup with fingers might not be something that the uninitiated would like to do, despite the increased preference for finger food in the Western world.

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<sup>91</sup> The mother of the chef at one of the venues had actually owned a 'chop bar' in a suburb of Accra and all her children had helped out at the bar when growing up (GRI May 2000, p. 40). Starting a restaurant in London had been a matter of course. The grandmother of the manageress of another restaurant had been in the catering business too (GRI May 2000, p. 38).

### 4.3. Eating out in the Ghanaian community

Despite the existence of Ghanaian eating places in London, first generation Ghanaian migrants who took part in the study seldom ate out, whether in a Ghanaian, or any other restaurant for that matter. Some women claimed it was because of the cost involved, but it was also linked with the general attitude towards eating out among older Ghanaians (and even not so old Ghanaians), discussed previously. Eating out (i.e. dinner) had not yet established itself as an acceptable practice throughout the community.

Gloria and Henry (hhB) voiced their views separately on the issue:

Gloria: Eating out. We don't do it much. Especially with a big family like mine. It turns out to be *very* expensive. Once in a while we'll go out. McDonald's, I've taken them to Chinese so we can all sit down. And that was maybe .. one of us birthdays and I say 'Oh I can be generous', I can spend a little bit more. We go out and have a meal out. We don't do it often. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 140

Henry: Since my wife is a professional caterer she knows the ingredients which should go into what we eat. So we don't normally go to those places. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 898

Married men were also more reluctant to eat out than married women because of conservative tastes:

When it comes to my meal, I'm a typical African. I have a typical African taste, when it comes to meals. 'Cos I find it very difficult going out [i.e. eating out]. Because you know like you go out to enjoy the meal isn't it, apart from maybe companionship, right. Because at work we have meetings and we have our lunches and dinners and stuff like that, but I don't see why I've got some very nice soup at home and you have to go to a Chinese to noooh. I don't see .. I hope you see where I'm coming from. Patrick (hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 129

In actual fact eating out occurred more frequently in single-parent rather than two-parent households. For example, when Evelyn's (hhI) husband was still alive they never went as a family to a restaurant. As a widow, Evelyn went once or twice a month, either with her daughters or friends, generally opting for a Chinese meal. Similarly, Gladys went out regularly with her daughters:

Some Sundays when I don't feel like cooking, yes we have a meal outside. Or some Saturdays when we go shopping there's this nice Chinese restaurant in Deptford, buffet type lunch time. We have our lunch there. So I'll substitute eating out for a meal. If I don't feel like cooking .... So yeah we do a lot of take-away too. But I also make it as a treat you know at least once a week we try and have something. If we can have it on Friday, mostly it's Friday we go for Kentucky, if not then Sunday we go to a noodle bar and have our lunch there. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 54

Eating out, it seemed, was generally associated with eating differently from home, i.e. non-Ghanaian food. In most cases it was fast food, which can be seen as food not marked ethnically, "culturally 'odourless' and homogenised" (Thomas, 2004: 63-4). The other, albeit less frequent, option was other 'ethnic' food, Chinese being the preferred option<sup>92</sup>. A further reason for Ghanaians to overlook Ghanaian restaurants was that they served similar dishes to those at home, with a few exceptions. Nevertheless, occasionally on Sundays after church Pauline (hhH) went to a Ghanaian restaurant to buy a take-away - *emotuo* and palmnut soup, or *banku* and okrostew - and ate it at home with her daughter.

#### 4.3.1. Meals and business in Ghanaian restaurants

Although not popular among my informants, Ghanaian restaurants did appeal to many Ghanaians, especially single males and unmarried couples who, according to the managers, formed the largest customer group. They included possibly more recent arrivals who were already accustomed to the idea of eating out in Ghana where the trend was changing<sup>93</sup>. Business was at its peak at weekends, when most venues had extended opening hours. For example, one of the restaurants generally became very busy only after 11pm at night and was open till 4am on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On both evenings when I was able to observe the cooking and serving of food, I had to leave just when the place

<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, many informants indicated that they did not like Indian food. The combination of spices did not appeal to many.

<sup>93</sup> Further research should be conducted on the role of restaurants in the life of Ghanaians by exploring the views of the customers. I only spoke to the managers.

was filling up, which was around midnight. The next day I heard that the staff hadn't gone home until 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning.

Considering the set up of the restaurants, they were in fact a mix of a formal restaurant and a chop bar, the male manager and interior design being a sign of the former, and the homemade heavy meals prepared by female cooks a sign of the latter. The menus of the various Ghanaian restaurants were all in all quite comparable, although some were more elaborate than others (see Appendix E for two menus, Menu A and Menu B).

Compared to menus of many other ethnic restaurants, e.g. Chinese or Indian, the selection of dishes on the menus was limited. The restaurants catered mainly for people of southern Ghana and prepared dishes typically from those areas, including favourite Ashanti, Ewe, Ga and Fanti dishes<sup>94</sup>. However, most restaurants also offered a typical dish associated with northern Ghana (*Tuo Zaafi*)<sup>95</sup>. Apart from a take-away serving mainly *kenkey*, none of the places sold exclusively regional dishes but focused on a selection that seemed to have become nationwide favourites, hence fusing them into a *Ghanaian* entity. The dishes had the basic two- or three-part structures as already described in the previous chapter. Although many restaurants had a choice of starters and desserts, these weren't favoured among Ghanaian customers, due to the large and *heavy* main course. Hence, Menu A in Appendix E reflects Ghanaian food culture more accurately.

Although rice is a very popular roadside dish in Ghana (Ayernor, 1998), in London, restaurateurs didn't mention it as one of the fashionable dishes. This

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<sup>94</sup> The only venue with a wider choice of dishes catered for a large number of Nigerians and West Indian customers too and hence included their favourite dishes on the menu. Apparently, far more Nigerians than Ghanaians lived in the particular locality. The manager explained that they had modified their menu over the years and taken on Nigerian chefs to cater for the taste of their Nigerian customers.

<sup>95</sup> Foods and culinary techniques in the northern savannah zone are markedly different from the coastal and forest regions, which have a great deal in common (Whitby, 1968: 8).



was most likely linked to the fact that Ghanaians ate a lot of rice at home. When they went out for a meal they preferred to eat something they didn't necessarily prepare themselves. *Banku* made with *real* fermented corn dough appeared to be the most popular dish in London exactly for this reason. Not everyone knew how to use the substitutes to make *banku* from ground rice and/or semolina (see chapter 5), and real *banku* took up to 45 minutes to make and it was a very laborious job. Served with okro soup, *banku* topped the list of favourite dishes in four of the restaurants that took part in the study; in the fifth venue it was *banku* and grilled tilapia with pepper sauce. *Fufu* and soup, *waakye* and stew, and fried yam with tilapia and pepper sauce were also popular.

What unites all the best loved dishes in Ghanaian restaurants, especially *banku*, *fufu* and *waakye*, is that they all form *heavy* meals. Hence, unlike at large functions where Ghanaians seemed to focus on 'lighter' Ghanaian foods and dishes (see next section), they did not hesitate to indulge in heavy foods when dining out. The homely environment encouraged eating in a similar fashion to that at home. Indeed, *familiarity* of food was undoubtedly the main incentive for single Ghanaian men not keen on cooking for frequenting the places. Ghanaian eating places had done well in their presentation of Ghanaian food and preserving tradition. This is in contrast to the food served in many 'Indian' restaurants in the UK where it has been adapted to the taste buds of the white majority.

#### **4.4. Ghanaian functions**

A further reason for the lack of demand for Ghanaian restaurants may be the fact that large social gatherings, or functions, are a very important part of Ghanaian life in London: an opportunity to socialise, to display collective identity and to share food in commensal eating. The significance of this aspect of Ghanaian culture was summed up by Serwa:

I think a lot Ghanaian life is centred around food. Culturally, food seems to be something that unites us. So we sort of associate happiness, contentment, or helping each other by making meals, and .. it's a great relaxation thing. Even when somebody's parent or relative dies in Ghana, we meet, we have a social gathering, and then we eat. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 771

The cohesive and diasporic nature (i.e. the preservance of a distinct identity vis-à-vis the host society [Brubaker, 2005: 6]) of the Ghanaian community in the metropolis was apparent at large functions. They were occasions to display traditional clothing and jewellery as well as special afro hair styles<sup>96</sup>. At the functions I attended, where the number of guests rose well above two hundred, I was the only white person, or one of a handful of white people there.

The importance of tribes or ethnic groups was apparent, as usually functions were arranged and attended by members of the same ethnic group.

If it is an Ashanti do, most people you find there will be Ashanti, therefore they will be speaking Ashanti not English as their main language. Hence all the other people who come there come as friends or visitors. If it is a Fanti (do), the same, so it's always important to know which tribe is having the do. ... Here in London there won't be a tribefree gathering, it's not common except in church. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 104-109

In London, there were several Hometown and tribal associations<sup>97</sup> (Henry & Mohan, 2003). However, there were also associations which were not based on territorial or tribal affiliations, but on professional or educational background (old school associations) (see also Attah-Poku, 1996; Elam et al., 2000). Church acted as a further unifier, so social gatherings organised and attended by church-based groups brought members of different ethnic groups together as well.

It was apparent that Ghanaians attended a variety of functions, arranged for different reasons and by different groups. Many of the informants went to functions regularly:

<sup>96</sup> One of my key informants pointed out that some Ghanaians would wear traditional clothing at a function, but would then change into Western clothes when driving home. He spoke about the 'Ghanaian phenomenon' indicating a dual or mixed identity and a lack of confidence.

<sup>97</sup> Most issues of Ghana Review International contained a list of associations in London.

Yeah Saturday is normally with the Ghanaian society, normally Saturdays there is something going. Either you go to a memorial service or something. There is always something, some function going on most of the time. So especially summer time most Saturdays you know, I'm not home. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1392-6

This weekend I've got Saturday off. I'm on a late on Sunday. So Saturday I've been invited to first communion party so I'm going to go to that. And then in the evening I'll go to the Ghana Nurses Association dance. And then Sunday I'm on a late shift. So I'll go to church in the morning and then go from there to work. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 248

For many Ghanaians, attendance at functions seemed to form a frequent source of entertainment and food. I was told that some Ghanaians went to functions to escape the loneliness they felt at home, ending up eating a great deal, and sometimes feeling even lonelier, if they didn't know anyone there.

In comparison to Ghana in the past, functions started quite late in the evenings and continued well past midnight, some until the early hours of the morning. The busy lifestyle in London meant that people could not attend social gatherings until they had seen to their own household chores, including shopping and cooking for the week ahead, or been to work, because many Ghanaians had weekend shifts too.

That's the only way of socialising, so we make a big deal out of it you know funeral celebrations start from around eight o'clock 'til you know, the next morning. Eating, drinking, dancing, all that's never like that in Ghana. It isn't. So 'cos over here I think people are most of the time confined to work and home. When there is something they make big deal out of it. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 1346

#### **4.4.1. Conspicuous consumption as a sign of success**

Food and drinks (soft drinks and alcohol)<sup>98</sup> were served in abundance at most functions. Similarly to Pakistani migrants in Norway (Ruud, 1998), Ghanaians organising a function in London were prepared to spend a lot of money on festive meals and social arrangements. The aim was to give an impression of high social status and successful migration. Ikpe calls this trend a "I have arrived or I have made it syndrome" in the Nigerian context (Ikpe, 1994: 139), where in the 1970s

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<sup>98</sup> Alcohol was not served at any functions (e.g. memorial services) arranged by Pentecostals.

and 1980s people announced their financial successes and other achievements to their families and wider circle of friends and acquaintances, even rivals, through the organization of costly feasts to which everyone was invited. Such feasts, according to Ikpe, were seen as a “means to achieving more material wealth with the accompanying respect, prestige and better opportunities in the society.” (1994: 140) More research should be carried out on Ghanaian functions in London, but I believe their feasts were based on similar aspirations to those of Nigerians. For example, at most family celebrations, such as outdoorings and memorial services, food and drink were provided in the hope that guests would donate. As one informant explained, if the guests thought the food was poor they were less likely to be charitable.

#### **4.4.2. The selection of dishes**

Food was comparable at most functions irrespective of occasion<sup>99</sup>, the organiser, or the tribal background of the group, unless it was an Ashanti funeral when only drinks would be served<sup>100</sup>. Food was in abundance, but it was very much the same type as eaten within the home, although some staples, sauces and cuts of meat were more popular than others<sup>101</sup>. Snack type foods, Ghanaian biscuits and doughnuts, were also served regularly. Rice dishes, such as *jollof* rice and fried rice were common, which can partly be explained by convenience and partly by the fact that in the past these types of dishes were considered luxury meals (Ikpe, 1994).

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<sup>99</sup> The exception was formal dinner dances taking place in hotels or restaurants, in aid of a Ghanaian organisation or some other cause, or to celebrate Ghanaian Independence, for example. The food served on such occasions was most likely European style.

<sup>100</sup> I was told that one of the reasons why some Ghanaians eat out so late at night in Ghanaian restaurants is the fact that they have attended an Ashanti funeral where no food is served.

<sup>101</sup> Ghanaians use some traditional, sacred, dishes for special occasions such as naming ceremonies (see Osseo-Asare, 2002). However, I never came across these foods, perhaps because social functions were not the focal point of the research.

Staples involving a lot of hard work, best eaten immediately after making them, such as *fufu* and *banku*, were not convenient for large social gatherings. Staples that could be reheated easily or even eaten cold, such as *kenkey*, were much more suitable<sup>102</sup>. Heavy food was not necessarily preferred because functions generally included socialising with others and dancing and a conventional heavy meal would not be appropriate in such a situation.

Even like at parties and everything, they'll do jollof rice, they'll do chicken, they'll do all these things, but they don't do things like fufu, and banku and akple, because of the way you have to make it. You know ... there's no way possible that you can start pounding or twisting fufu for a party because ... the amount of arms you'll need to do it, it's just not practical. Even soup they don't they don't do it there because it's heavy, heavy foods, so they don't. Emeffa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 326-30

The type of meat served varied from roasted or grilled chicken wings and drumsticks to a variety of meat and fish stews, containing cuts of meat favoured by many Ghanaians (see chapter 5):

But if you go to the average let's say funeral or wedding, you find meals of okay healthy ones, but then when you come to the meat dishes, oh there must be the cow foot or the this that that, and it's just gelatin. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 129

Savoury foods were often displayed in a very untraditional manner, as a buffet, so guests were able to pile their plates with whatever they fancied. Social gatherings seemed to be the only occasion when people ate more than just one plateful, and mixed and matched food in many ways.

And at the christening I had everything: waakye, which is like rice and peas, jollof rice, I had plantain, I had meat stew, shito, noodles, salad. ... So yesterday we ate absolutely everything. Delicious [laughs]. It was so nice, really nice. Penelope (hhl, 22, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 11

There'll be kenkey and fish, jollof rice, waakye and goat meat stew, lightsoup, drumsticks .. and titbits you know like cakes, what do you call these things, we call it atchomo .... And you have these little doughnuts and sometimes you will have fried plantain, but not the ripe one but the green ones that is actually grated and fried and it's very very crispy. And you can chew it with peanuts. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 210

<sup>102</sup> The advantage of *kenkey* was that it could be served sliced in half or even smaller pieces. *Waakye*, usually considered heavy food, was like rice in that small servings were possible.

The inclusion of English food, such as sandwiches, savoury pies and salads, and the style of service or display can be understood from the past in Ghana where formal occasions were marked by serving a variety of English cooking (Goody, 1982). The fact that English food was still part of the display at some functions mirrored the hybrid identities of Ghanaians and the shared aspiration of Ghanaians to be British.

As Ghanaian food became fashionable at social gatherings, some dishes came to symbolise the newly found confidence in all things Ghanaian. Some of these were traditionally sold in the streets in Ghana, such as *waakye* and *kenkey*.

Well sometimes when like *waakye* for example. It wasn't something that my parents ever cooked. I only saw people selling it in the streets or in the market. It never appealed to me. So when I came to England ... *waakye* became a speciality in Ghanaian parties. *Everywhere* you go and it's *waakye* and it's *kenkey*. I say what's this! It was unheard of. And then maybe somebody who tried it once in the party and it was successful so it has become a thing. But *how* they cook it with their stew and everything like back home I wouldn't do it here in my house. Because I don't even know how to prepare it that way. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 300

Street fare was generally recalled with longing. Apart from a special taste, its appeal was based on convenience and uncomplicated eating (no plates, food wrapped in leaves or paper), and it was often eaten together with friends on the move. The inclusion of typical street food in the display of dishes at social gatherings in London resembled the trend mentioned by Mennell in which formerly lower-class dishes have been taken up in higher circles: "Their appeal rested on nostalgia (always potent force in food advertising) and 'inverted snobbery'". (Mennell, 1985: 327)

Borda reports of a similar phenomenon among Latin American refugees in Sweden who had chosen dishes or foods (e.g. small meat pies called *empanadas*) that were once considered 'lower-class' to represent their food culture at formal social gatherings and private parties (Borda, 1987). Borda

believes that the refugees used the food as a potent symbol of their ethnic identities and leftist background in which they took pride.

Ghanaians had clearly gained a new curiosity and pride in their traditional food culture. Social functions now provided one of the main opportunities to learn about foods and dishes of other tribal groups or regions in Ghana. It seemed that many Ghanaians were similar to the early Italian migrants in America who left Italy ignorant of cuisines beyond their own regions (Diner, 2001: 53). Serwa explained what happened when she took typical Ewe dishes to a friend's father's memorial service:

It's not every Ghanaian that eats akple. *But* you can have Ghanaians who'll eat akple but they've never heard of this. They've never heard of yakayeke. Nor abolo. And when I took it it was just a craze. Everybody goes for that first because it's not something that you can buy. ... Most people will go for the traditional dishes that they don't cook themselves at home. So that you know the gatherings are usually you know for eating as people were back in Ghana. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pgs 15 and 31

Yet, as Emefa pointed out, since certain dishes were not generally prepared at all for functions, she and others like her, had grown up in London without really getting to know some of the typical Ghanaian dishes, especially if they weren't made at home:

That's why the kids even that go socially and everything, grow up on rice, because it's the easiest, it's the easiest to cook, easiest to eat you know, you do a bit of sweeping up afterwards because they've dropped it everywhere. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 326-30

#### **4.5. Summary and conclusions**

Previous research shows that good availability of reasonably priced ethnic food ingredients enables migrants to create and maintain their own food culture, which in turn sustains their sense of ethnic identity (Charon Cardona, 2004; Jamal, 1996). Furthermore, ethnic cafés and restaurants have been found to be important for practices of home-building in the public-sphere and as reminders of social and communal solidarities within the migrant and ethnic minority

communities. Most of the major minority ethnic communities in Britain opened up food-related businesses very early in the migration process; however this was not the case for Africans, whose lack of involvement has not been studied in detail before.

In the present chapter, I analysed the development of the provision of Ghanaian food and food-related businesses as part of the growth of the Ghanaian community in London, with focus on food retail outlets, restaurants and large social gatherings. I also examined the impact of improved availability of Ghanaian or African foodstuffs on the shopping habits of Ghanaians. This chapter addressed the first research question by looking at ways in which foodways are maintained, transformed and renewed by migrants in particular at the *community level*. Since many of the issues are linked with the sense of ethnic identity and belonging, the chapter also addressed the second research question on the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups, as well as the third question on the role of gender in maintaining foodways and ethnic identities.

The focus was initially on the memories early migrants had of the change in the provision of Ghanaian food in London, and on information obtained from shop keepers and restaurateurs. It was apparent that the availability and presence of Ghanaian foods in markets, shops and restaurants increased slowly and relatively recently. However, through transnational links and food parcels some migrants have always had relatively good access to, and a regular supply of, original Ghanaian foodstuffs, while others without such links have had to go without them in the past, resorting to substitutes and adjusting their tastes, this being a key topic of the following chapter. In this way food parcels have caused disparities in the Ghanaian community despite their role in bringing people together and reinforcing Ghanaian identities. The research also drew attention to



informal trade in Ghanaian food in London, the most significant being the production of *kenkey* in the homes by women who sell it through informal and formal outlets. Ghanaian women continued working as traders both transnationally and locally.

In regard to shopping practices, the Ghanaian community was quite divided when it came to actually buying food, despite the present-day good availability of Ghanaian/African ingredients in London. The ability and willingness to buy typically Ghanaian foodstuffs on a regular basis was a sign of differentiation within the community which otherwise seemed geared to economizing and cutting back unnecessary expenditure on food. For some, typical Ghanaian produce was essential for their sense of ethnic identity, while others – especially long-term sojourners – could clearly go without it. Gender appeared to play a role here too, men or husbands being an incentive for women to purchase typically Ghanaian food.

Looking at the development of food-related businesses, a significant finding was that, unlike many other migrant groups, Ghanaians were not interested in improving the availability of familiar ingredients and foods when they first began to settle in London in greater numbers. This was due to several factors, with gendered division of labour, sexual connotation of cooking and former colonial influence on identities being at the top of the list. With the selling and preparing of food so firmly in the hands of women in Ghana, and because of the familiarity and preference for European food by many of the early migrants, the establishment of food-related businesses did not pick up until there was an increase in the number of Ghanaian women in London and a growth in pride and acceptance of ethnic food and identities within the UK. In other words, migration did not alter the gendered division of labour, and although Ghanaian men entered the catering trade as managers, often as a side-venture, Ghanaian women were

the main actors behind the scene despite the arduous work and unfriendly working hours.

Viewing the characteristics and menus of the restaurants in more detail, one of the main findings was that they were geared to providing co-ethnic community members, especially young single males, a relatively small selection of regional (southern Ghanaian) dishes that seemed to have become nationwide favourites and now represented a national Ghanaian cuisine. They banked on Ghanaians' preference for familiarity and satiety, and served, among other things, the most arduous and cumbersome heavy dishes, which were made less frequently in the homes. Most were sold traditionally in the chop bars and streets of Ghana, which reflected the longing migrants had for this type of food. The meals followed the same traditional format as in Ghana, and notably, none of the restaurants provided typically English or European food. For some Ghanaians, especially the elderly, the eating locales – most of which were a mix of a formal restaurant and a chop bar – were ambivalent places, because eating out (i.e. dinner) had not yet established itself as acceptable practice throughout the community or within Ghana.

Large social functions were in many instances arranged and attended by members of the same tribal group, and used as an opportunity to display an impression of high social status and financial success. One of the findings was that, apart from a few exceptions, the main dishes served were much the same at every function regardless of tribe or event, thus presenting a Ghanaian cuisine. Many of the dishes were similar to those eaten within Ghanaian homes in London, yet excluded the most cumbersome and heavy ones. The trend of providing English-style party foods (e.g. sandwiches) had diminished over the years, and there was a new fashion of special tribal or regional dishes appearing at some functions. These phenomena underlined not only the recently found

confidence in all things Ghanaian but also the importance of expressing tribal identities in the metropolis. As Kalcik states, “once one has attained high status or a strong sense of identity and satisfaction with present status, one can afford to eat low-status food.” (Kalcik, 1984: 50) Ghanaian food may have been considered low-status in the early years of settlement in London, but this wasn’t the case any longer.

Considering the ‘career’ of an ethnic food business, which begins with “provisioning in-group consumers and later branches out to provide for ‘host’ culture” (Bell & Valentine, 1997: 117), Ghanaians are still in the very early stages of this career. Ghanaian eating locales were used for cultural identification and an enactment of the past by a relatively small proportion of Ghanaians, which differentiates them from many other migrant and ethnic minority communities (Ferrero, 2002; Hage, 1997; Tam, 1997). Reasons revealed in this research for the slow establishment of businesses among Ghanaians in the food retail and catering sector may partly explain the low levels of engagement in business of any type (see Barrett et al., 2001), although the gendered division of labour is particularly valid for the food sector. Some of the reasons are likely to be applicable to other West African migrants who share similar societal organisation and colonial history with the Ghanaians (e.g. Nigerians).

The division of labour in Ghanaian restaurants is very unlike many other communities, even the predominant white one, where men are usually chefs in the public, commercial realm (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Fürst, 1997; Harbottle, 2000; Mennell, 1985). For example, for Iranian men in the UK, restaurants are not foreign terrain as they are chefs in their home country (Harbottle, 1997a; Harbottle, 2000). In ‘Indian’ restaurants, although the wife is usually involved in the business, she normally provides “administrative, clerical and other support to the owner whenever it is required.” (Basu, 2002: 165).

For a newly arrived migrant today, the experience of the metropolis is very different from that of a fellow Ghanaian who made the journey thirty or forty years ago. Although the provision of Ghanaian food increased slowly, the availability is now so good that some don't see the need to return to Ghana. Ghanaian food in this fashion has played an important part in transforming *bidesh* into *desh*, as in Gardner's (1995: 8) words. The Ghanaian community in present day London is undoubtedly part of the *same* society as that in Ghana, or an 'annexe', as one of the informants lucidly put it (see quote at the end of section 2.2.1 on p. 80). Food in its different forms – food parcels, commodities flown in from Ghana the previous day, fast food relying on regular imports (*kenkey* wrapped in corn sheaths), 'chop bar' meals in Ghanaian restaurants, special tribal dishes at social gatherings – and the people, in particular women, and activities linked with the formal and informal food businesses, have helped to build the transnational, diasporic, society (see also Mazzucato, 2005).

Alongside the transformation of the society, there has been a change in attitude. Ghanaian food is now openly used to inspire community pride and cohesion, which wasn't the case until quite recently. Unlike in the private sphere, Ghanaians downplay ethnic or tribal differences in the community, and there is a unified front as far as food at social gatherings and restaurants is concerned. Like an Akan *kente* cloth, originating from the Ashanti region, the ball of *kenkey* produced by Ghanaian women in London signifies the boost in self-confidence, and pride in Ghanaian identity. *Kenkey*, as well as some of the other regional foods, have shifted levels of identity in the new environment and have become symbols of not just a place or region (e.g. Fanti *kenkey* or Ga *kenkey*) but of Ghana as a whole (see Sutton, 2001). They evoke a national Ghanaian identity. Hence, despite ethnic divisions in London as regards various groupings and associations are concerned, food has not been used to emphasise these

differences in the public sphere, or at least not until very recently. The fact that special or uncommon regional dishes have started appearing at some functions, may indicate that there is a new desire to express other elements of hybrid identities. Moreover, while recent migrants can use the improved provision of typical Ghanaian ingredients and foods to *maintain* their Ghanaian, even tribal, identities, for Ghanaians who have resided in the country for a long period of time, these foods can help *rediscover* and *renew* parts of their ethnic identities that perhaps have been lost or faded over the years.

## **5. FOOD AND EATING WITHIN GHANAIAN HOUSEHOLDS IN LONDON**

Although migrants strive to maintain their previous foodways in the new surroundings, transformation is usually inevitable and linked with various factors, including changing ethnic identities. Food habits of the second generation are often a mixture of the various cultures they are embedded in, whilst the home is the main arena for the negotiation of evolving habits and practices.

This chapter focuses on the maintenance, transformation and renewal of food habits and ethnic identities within migrant households. Therefore, it addresses the research questions: How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels? What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups? Through the analysis of food habits or preferences within households, the chapter also addresses the third question on the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities. With regard to the eating system, focus is not only on the horizontal spheres – meal format, eating pattern and meal cycle – but also on the vertical spheres – basic food preparation rules and the social organisation of eating.

There are three main sections to the chapter: The first one concentrates on the ways in which Ghanaians have striven to maintain their food habits by using substitutes to preserve the characteristics and formats of Ghanaian meals. The section begins by looking at the meanings of Ghanaian food for informants and then proceeds to analyse food and meal preparation in the early years when access to typical Ghanaian ingredients was poor.

The second section deals with the transformation of foodways (i.e. eating pattern, meal format, meal cycle) within Ghanaian households and the variation of habits

according to individual and household characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, length of stay in the country, and household composition. The focus is on current habits which are compared with past practices in Ghana. Changing eating habits and identities of the second generation are given special attention.

The third section focuses on the social organisation of eating and the role of family meals in the Ghanaian context. It shows that family meals as understood in the Western context were not important for most Ghanaians in present day London or in Ghana in the past.

The chapter highlights, among other things, the importance of substitutes in creating foods and meals with a similar structure, texture, and heaviness to those in Ghana. It also draws attention to the role of women in food preparation and the gendered patterns of consumption.

### **5.1. Creating Ghanaian meals in the diaspora**

No matter how long a log remains in the pond, it can never become a crocodile.  
(A Ghanaian proverb, as recounted by one of the informants.)

Rain wets a leopard's skin, but it does not wash out the spots. (An Akan proverb)

Although many Ghanaians in London were readily eating what they called 'English' or 'European' food, when they cooked for themselves in the evenings or weekends they still preferred 'Ghanaian' food. As indicated in chapter 3, Ghanaians used the terms 'Ghanaian' and 'African' interchangeably for the food they were used to in Ghana. In London, certain types of dishes or ingredients appeared to be more 'Ghanaian' than others.

So when I'm talking of Ghanaian food, I'm referring to kenkey, going to the shop and getting kenkey, getting bushmeat, getting plantain, Ghana yam, yam from Ghana, making okra soup. ... And all these snails and dried fish. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 467

HT: And when you say a Ghanaian meal then you mean

Serwa: Ghanaian meal being yam with spinach or ehm gari foto or yakayeke or fried fish with anything .. things like that, or soup, or light soup with fufu. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 2099-2101

They'd rather go for smoked fish to give it a smoky, to give it a smoky flavour, I don't like the smoky flavour, which to them is the distinct African whatever it is, taste. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 181

For some, *typical* Ghanaian food was food prepared with original ingredients from Ghana, using original cooking techniques and methods. Others, however, were more lax about what was 'Ghanaian', including the basic rice and stew in their definition of Ghanaian food, i.e. dishes that didn't necessarily require any special ingredients from Ghana. In fact, the way in which *fufu* was prepared in the UK, meant that no special *Ghanaian* ingredients were needed to make it, yet for many it was a symbol of Ghanaian food *par excellence*. Children especially, or the second generation, thought that *fufu* and soup symbolised a typical Ghanaian meal.

Some informants were aware of the difficulty of defining Ghanaian food and were not sure whether they were actually preparing and eating *Ghanaian* food or something else, possibly also reflecting the uncertainty or fluctuation they experienced with their identity.

Gladys: So there's also the confusion how do you determine I mean this what you just had how do we categorise it, is it Ghanaian or is it Western food? Because we make compromises we've adapted in so many ways.

HT: What would you call that stew that you've got there?

Gladys: I don't know, I was thinking of it. I'm probably thinking in terms of relating it to Ghana, thinking of it as a Ghanaian dish. Right if you look at it, there's nothing really Ghanaian about it. Cooking rice with beans. Let's say the stew is just meat and the tomatoes which is normally the basis is onions, tomatoes and the pepper, and then cooked it a bit and you add the meat. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 467-71

Gladys is referring to the various ways in which Ghanaians have modified foods and dishes while living in London, either by using substitutes resembling the original ingredients or in some other fashion, something I will be dealing with in more detail in the following sections.



The two siblings in household C had quite strong views about Ghanaian and European foods or meals. As they had lived most of their formative years in the UK, both spending several years in boarding schools and thereafter at university, they were very familiar with English or European food. In effect, they seldom prepared *typical* Ghanaian food for themselves, although some food was still Ghanaian to a degree:

Lisa: I really rarely make the tomato based sauce. I get laughed at anyway 'cos they are not they're not quite Ghanaian enough.

HT: So what would not be quite Ghanaian enough? Meaning?

Fiona: It hasn't been, I haven't laboriously stood over the stove for about four hours [laughs] and mashed the [laughs] mashed the eh tomatoes by hand and the peppers and the shrimp by hand, I just do it quite easily.

Lisa: We don't even bother with shrimps n' ginger n' all that, you know that's what I mean we don't do it really like the proper Ghanaians because we bypass a lot of things .. I mean the reason it's Ghanaian is because we cooked it the way that it was, it used to be you know.

Fiona: [chuckles] The only reason why it's Ghanaian is 'cos is because I'm Ghanaian [laughs]. Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) & Fiona (hhC, 26, 1979) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1642-50

Here, what is significant is that Fiona still identifies herself as Ghanaian and that it also labels the food she prepares. As Douglas notes,

ethnic food is a cultural category, not a material thing. It can persist over fundamental material changes so long as the feeling of ethnic distinctiveness is valued. (Douglas, 1984b: 30)

On the other hand, taking Fiona's definition seriously would mean that anything she prepared could be categorised as Ghanaian, which would not be true as she also prepared other types of food which she didn't classify as Ghanaian. In fact, both Gladys, above, and Lisa refer to some of the very basic shared Ghanaian cooking rules and processes, which make a dish resemble a Ghanaian meal despite lacking typically Ghanaian ingredients. As emphasised by Harbottle, the cooking process is crucial in relation to the potential cultural transformation and the value intrinsic to the meal (Harbottle, 2000: 151).

### 5.1.1. Maintenance and re-creation of the meal format: substitutes and new ingredients

As indicated in the previous chapter, after arrival in the UK, the poor availability of typical Ghanaian or African foodstuffs in London in the early years meant that most Ghanaians had to construct meals without familiar ingredients or limit their diet to the ones they knew.

You couldn't readily get plantain, you couldn't readily get cassava, you couldn't readily get palm oil, which were you know like staple foods. Gari you couldn't easily get here, so we were (bound) to eat potatoes, you know basically what was here you made the best use of. You eat your potatoes and rice, you find we eat a lot of rice because that is another familiar food which is also, even even *that* was very expensive, you have to go to Sainsbury or Tesco to get n' it's very expensive. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 53

In the 1960s even long grain rice was not common:

But then at that time we didn't even have *rice*. When I first came here, only the rice for rice pudding. You know the round ones. That was all the rice we had. And every time you boiled that it went soggy and the inside wasn't cooked properly. You know. We couldn't make it right. So it was fufu, all the time. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 984

The situation facing the newcomers was very much like that described by Fischler (1988) as 'the omnivore's paradox' (see section 1.1.1). On the one hand, they needed to find new foodstuffs to replace unobtainable ones and so explored various options. On the other hand, they were reluctant to change their diet and were wary of trying new ingredients; even afraid of the impact they could have on their bodies (neophobia). For some, the process of incorporation of novel foodstuffs was very long, symbolising the concurrent gradual change in identity.

So our eating was really basic. Besides I didn't know you know the vegetables then and the fruits, we don't have them in Africa. So I was very very cautious. I didn't know what I liked and it took me a *long* time to start eating vegetables. So every time we even cooked ordinary ampesie with boiled potatoes and stew I never used to have vegetables. Never, until gradually I introduced myself to ... I started with carrots and then after a few years I started with the others. And then when I did a cookery course then I started working in canteens and I saw that they were alright to eat. Otherwise I never ever ate vegetables, and even fruit it was just oranges. Because all these exotic fruits we don't have them you know. [chuckles] We've got apples in Ghana [now]. When I go to Ghana I see apples. Apples in Ghana! [chuckles] We never had those. So our eating was really just .. basic .. basic things. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 448

Not everyone was necessarily as suspicious and careful as Grace in the beginning. She was one of the few informants from a rural background used to a relatively small variety of foodstuffs. Furthermore, she had not attended boarding school, unlike many of the other early migrants<sup>103</sup>. Nevertheless, even those with a higher level of education were eating a much more restricted diet, focusing first on the common staple potato, which, peeled and boiled, replaced yam (*ampesie*), and later on rice. Since many were used to a wider variety of staples from Ghana, they were reluctant to rely only on these, especially as they were not considered heavy foods. Therefore, they searched for alternatives in order to create meals that resembled those back home. There seemed to be a consensus in the Ghanaian community on what ingredients were used as substitutes and how they were prepared.

The substitutes were either a different foodstuff altogether or the same as in Ghana but in a modified, generally processed, form. By using substitutes Ghanaians aimed at recreating not only a similar taste, but also the same format, consistency and colour of food and meals. In many instances, structural properties outweighed the taste of the food (hence the avoidance of pudding rice). And as with any new foodstuff, some substitutes were more readily accepted, whereas others needed getting used to despite the similar appearance to the original food:

You cry when you see it [laughs] when you come here and they give you that oh my goodness no matter how hard you swallow it doesn't taste like Ghana fufu, but *gradually* you get used to it. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 932-6

The perseverance to like the new substitutes symbolises the importance of the foods they replaced to the newcomers' ethnic identities. One could say that

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<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, however, Grace was now eating a very wide variety of vegetables and fruits.

substitute staples helped migrants sustain not only their Ghanaian but also their tribal affiliation.

### *Starchy staples*

*Fufu* was prepared in the early years in London from the ubiquitous potato, although in Ghana it was most commonly made from pounded plantain and cassava. *Fufu* is in effect a good example of the way in which some substitutes were dropped as better or more convenient alternatives came along (see Table 5.1 for the development of *fufu* substitutes in the UK).

**Table 5.1.** Development of *fufu* substitutes in the UK.

Time period	Fufu substitutes
1950s until late 1960s:	Boiled peeled potatoes passed through a sieve mixed with potato starch ('farina'). <sup>104</sup>
Approx. 1970 – present day:	Instant mashed potatoes ('mash') <sup>105</sup> mixed with farina.
Approx. 1995 – present day:	Three types of processed fufu: powdered plantain and cassava; powdered yam; or powdered coco yam, all imported from the USA <sup>106</sup> .

Not everyone appreciated the new *fufu* substitutes when they became available, indicating again how neophobia was part and parcel of the adaptation process:

When the powder came I couldn't stand it. It took me a *long* time to get used to it. I was still cutting up my potato, boiling and passing it through a sieve for a *long* time before I started using the potato powder. And I'm used to that now. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 238

Caroline (hhJ), on the other hand, was afraid to start using the new plantain *fufu* powder as she was "scared" that she would get stomach pains because of being used to eating *fufu* made from mash and farina (1<sup>st</sup>, pg 951-8). The highly

<sup>104</sup> An informant who arrived in the 1960s also told about Ghanaians (Ashantis) pounding fufu in the garden, most likely using ingredients sent from home.

<sup>105</sup> I was told that the quality of *fufu* depended on the make of 'mash', better fufu resulting from the more expensive ones.

<sup>106</sup> The new fufu powders imported from the USA are symbols of the diasporic nature of the Ghanaian community.

processed ingredients bred “symbolic danger” as opposed to the “symbolic purity” of the unrefined, original foodstuffs<sup>107</sup> (Fischler, 1980: 946).

It is notable that Ghanaians were not interested in the original form of the substitute, i.e. mashed potatoes, although some children liked it<sup>108</sup>. This can be explained largely by the lack of a food with such consistency in Ghana. The way in which mash and farina were prepared, resulted in sticky dense dough, very much like the real *fufu* in Ghana, suitable for eating with soup with fingers and swallowing without chewing. It was easier to accept than mashed potato as it fitted an existing category or replaced the old one so well. It was as bland and pale as the original and, possibly most importantly, resulted in an equally *heavy* meal. Grace on her former husband:

He loved his heavy food, that's why he had a big stomach. *Heavy* food. Heavy eating, all the time. Fufu all the time. Sometimes twice a day. All the time. He didn't like you see at that time potato, boiled potato he didn't like that. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 984

Another heavy meal was produced using ground rice and/or semolina as substitutes for *banku* which in Ghana was made from fermented corn dough and a little cassava dough. It is another interesting staple food, because Ghanaians preferred these substitutes to corn (maize) meal which was available in the UK:

The Indian Head [corn meal], I don't like it. I don't like the *taste*, it doesn't taste the same so I never use it. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 94

The yellow colour of the corn meal was another factor which made some Ghanaians dislike it, as in Ghana corn meal and corn dough were a pale creamy colour. A further reason for rejecting it was that it needed to be fermented before

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<sup>107</sup> I actually observed real *fufu* being made from cocoyam and cassava in a Ghanaian-English home. The pestle was half the usual length but the mortar was the right size. The pounding took place in the back garden. Although the ingredients were now easily available, the practice was not widespread at all. A large proportion of Ghanaians live in (council) flats with no garden, this being a restrictive factor in itself, time another. In fact, the person who made the *fufu* indicated that she normally used mash and farina.

<sup>108</sup> A few informants also indicated that they did not like boiled potatoes, although they ate *fufu* prepared from potato mash and farina.

it could be prepared into *banku*. Yet it was possible to prepare *banku* from semolina and/or ground rice without going through the lengthy fermentation process. The secret was to add some vinegar to the dough:

I used to mix ground rice and semolina. ... And even to make it more *familiar* as in *banku* I tend to add vinegar to get that tangy taste to *banku*. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 807

When I first made the ground rice, I said (to another Ghanaian lady) I didn't like it, it was so very funny, texture and taste and everything. And she told me 'oh did you add vinegar'. And I said 'no'. So I learnt it from there. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 247

In the early years, yellow corn meal was, nevertheless, accepted as an ingredient for *kenkey*, which a few women made at home, despite the lack of corn sheaths for wrapping around the dumplings. Aluminium foil was used for this purpose instead. For example, Caroline (hhJ) went to the trouble of making *kenkey* for her husband, although she herself did not like it at all. This was in the 1970s. Another informant explained:

So what I did, we made our own *kenkeys*, we had to spend time and make our own *kenkey*. You know get that corn meal, soak it up, leave it for about a week, to get it fermented, and then make our own *kenkey* out of it. That is when we got the tip of adding a bit of vinegar to give it that kick, you know that sourness. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 47

The laborious, time-consuming (and smelly) process of making *kenkey* explains partly why Ghanaians were so keen to accept *kenkey* made by others when it became available in Ghanaian shops, or through acquaintances. By this time (i.e. 1990s) *kenkey* women were using either imported fermented corn dough or one manufactured in the UK.

### ***Substitutes overtaking original foodstuffs***

As with the original staples, there were shared rules concerning the combination of substitute staples and sauces.

You can eat ground rice and what I've showed you or any stew you've got together, you can't eat ground rice and soup, you can't because it's too watery. You need a proper stew to give it taste. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 336

FIELDNOTES: So this okra stew goes with banku, semolina or ground rice. You “can’t eat it with rice or yam or fufu”. When I asked why can’t it be eaten with these, she made a face of distaste and frowned and said she didn’t know. They just don’t seem to go together. Lucy (hhL, Ashanti/Ga, 35+, 1993) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 36

For some Ghanaians, the substitutes had become superior in quality and taste to the foods they replaced. Caroline indicated that she actually did not like the real *banku* made from corn dough – now available in Ghanaian shops – but preferred the substitutes made from ground rice or semolina, even though she did not know what the latter consisted of.

I don’t know what semolina is made out of, I don’t know what semolina is, I saw semolina when I came here. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1393

Gladys also preferred the substitute, especially as her children liked it.

OK sometimes I’ll make the okrasoup and I make what we called ground rice, it should be the banku, but because we haven’t got, I mean it’s difficult to get the corn dough the proper consistency so I adapted it and I use powdered rice for it. And it comes out really nice, the kids like it. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 66

Only a few indicated that they made real *banku* with the original ingredients:

Carol: I’d rather buy the corn dough and make the banku myself.

HT: You would do that?

Carol: Yeah. So maybe I do it on Sundays and put them in foil and keep them in plastic freezer bags and put them somewhere. And eat them when I feel like it with fish or stew or whatever. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 707-171

Carol even went to the trouble of soaking and grating fresh cassava for the cassava dough.

While the original *fufu* was made by pounding tubers with a pestle and mortar – clearly a heavy task – substitute fufu involved mixing the ingredients in a saucepan – a relief for many:

Better in *taste* and there’s less energy to pound. ‘Cos there’s no pounding, another thing I used to *hate*. And if you know how to make it you scarcely get it lumpy. That’s another thing. Lumpy fufu I *hate*. It’s awful! You scarcely get it lumpy. So it makes it much *better* and easier to prepare that fufu than to prepare it back home style. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 552

A number of informants indicated that when they went to Ghana they took mash and farina with them as they had developed a palate for the *fufu* made from these. Substitutes symbolised a new standard of cooking, or *better* habits, learnt in the UK, and served as a means of differentiating visiting expatriates from local people.

Even if I'm going home I'd take some mashed potato with me. Because that [i.e. pounded fufu] seems too cold. Because they turn it and play with their hands, so no I can't eat it any more. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 238-42

INTERVIEW SUMMARY: When Pauline's sister went to Ghana she couldn't eat the fufu. It tasted too cold and she saw it as very unhealthy. "When you travel and go back you see everything different." The mortar looked old, and also turning fufu by hand turned her off. She took the mash and the farina with her. Fufu is Pauline's sister's favourite food. But she couldn't make herself eat the pounded version. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 150

*Fufu* in London had gained a new property: after mixing mash and farina on the stove the resulting dough was much *hotter* than the original pounded one, and Ghanaians had got used to this. Furthermore, they had become more conscious of hygiene and perceived the Ghanaian one as unhygienic, and not up to their acquired standards.

Some substitutes used for sauces were now favoured instead of the originals. For example, Caroline (hhJ) was so used to using tomatoes and onion to thicken light soup that she didn't like to use garden eggs any more although they were now available. Likewise, although in Ghana fresh tomatoes were traditionally used for cooking, tinned tomatoes replaced them here.

Then if you use fresh tomatoes here you don't get the right colour. So the tin is the much (better) substitute one to use. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 743

Many of the substitutes were *convenience* foods, saving time and trouble in the cooking process. The younger generation especially favoured quickness and spontaneity in preparing meals. Tinned and processed products enabled cooking according to one's fancy without having to spend a lot of time in food preparation. In the following example, Fiona and Lisa talked about black-eyed beans:



Fiona: Soak them yeah it's too much work, and once you've soaked them because you have to soak them over night and then you are *tied* into doing them the next day, say you have something to do, at least with the beans it's instant

Lisa: The canned

Fiona: I mean the canned yeah it's instant and you can just decide to do it there and then whereas if you if you haven't got the canned .. beans it's like you have to like *plan* it well in advance .. it's too long and cumbersome anyway. Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) & Fiona (hhC, 26, 1979) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1266-74

However, although not all substitutes were convenience foods as such, many Ghanaians who migrated to London in the early years were so well accustomed to using them that out of habit they did not necessarily revert to the originals when they became widely available.

Now because it's cheaper you tend to add more Ghanaian things. But along the line you have adapted to, you have made compromises and substituted things. So although it's now available and you can eat it you don't always want it because you've developed a new taste. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 456-8

In a similar fashion, Harbottle found that some Iranians in Britain had noticed a change in their "taste perceptions" such that "one woman found that she no longer liked the flavour of food prepared by her mother, but preferred her own culinary efforts, based on British ingredients." (Harbottle, 2000: 46)

In families in which children grew up without tasting the original foodstuffs, they especially did not take to them. For example, the two eldest in Household J (born in the late 1970s and early 1980s) did not like yam or plantain, as they had not been part of the weekly menu when they grew up. The only typically Ghanaian food the second eldest liked was *fufu* made from mash and farina – already part of the family diet. The eldest did not even fancy this. The three youngest (born in the 1990s), however, enjoyed eating Ghanaian *puna* yam and plantain which were now a regular part of the household diet. Furthermore, children didn't necessarily get accustomed to the particular sour flavour of some of the original Ghanaian staples (e.g. fermented foods such as *kenkey*), the liking of which needs cultural conditioning (Messer, 1989: 7).

In present day London, Ghanaians appeared to have a wider choice of staples than ever before<sup>109</sup>. This was partly because the substitutes had not been dropped when the original foodstuffs became available. Two informants – one a relatively recent migrant to the UK (Lucy, hhL) – actually prepared *banku* from corn dough imported from Ghana, but also made ‘semolina’ or ‘ground rice’, indicating that not all Ghanaians perceived them as substitutes to *banku* but as new, alternative, staples.

The development of these new staples is in a way similar to the invention of spaghetti and meatballs by Italians in America (Diner, 2001: 53). The dish had not previously been part of Italian food tradition in Italy but became a fixture in Italian homes in America. In Diner’s words, the migrants “created new foods and food practices but skilfully draped them with the mantle of tradition.” (2001: 54) Ghanaians found not only new staples but, as with the ‘Italian’ meatballs, used new ingredients for their various stews and soups too.

### *Sauces*

Although sauces retained their basic characteristics, the type and amount of meat used in them was one of the most significant changes. Chicken was now very common in stews and soups, although in Ghana, as a prestigious ingredient, it was sparingly used by all but the wealthiest. Due to its popularity in the UK, chicken was no longer useful as a marker of social status as it had been before. Apart from chicken, many of the types and cuts of meat favoured by Ghanaians in London were the least expensive ones available, yet the reason for buying

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<sup>109</sup> The wide array of staples used by Ghanaians was reflected in the list of most popular foodstuffs bought by Ghanaians in Ghanaian food stores (see Appendix D). Among the fifteen most popular ones listed by the shopkeepers, ten were starchy staple products. This did not include potato which was still eaten by Ghanaians. Puna yam from Ghana topped the list, yet mash and farina as well as the new *fufu* flours made from plantain and cocoyam were included in the list. However, since semolina and ground rice were not typical Ghanaian foodstuffs they were not mentioned, although available.

these (e.g. cow foot, oxtail, offal, tripe, salted pork, tongue) was not purely economic<sup>110</sup>.

We'll go in and we look at the prices and the cheaper cut .. we buy that. And as I said we used to buy cowfoot and not even buy it, we were given cowfoot and tripe. And salted .. salted ehm .. pork. We used to buy that a lot. Because we found that was tasty and hard. Because we didn't like this soft meat. Otherwise we'll put the meat in the oven to harden it a bit. Give it a bit of flavour before we cook. And to get rid of the grease. It was too greasy. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 520

Ghanaians were used to tougher meat in Ghana, especially those who ate the meat of bush animals regularly, which was also lean<sup>111</sup>. Chicken was also tougher in Ghana than in London, where it had to be deep-fried before adding to stews, so that it became drier and did not disintegrate under lengthy cooking when preparing a stew.

Grace (hhE) – who was more health conscious than many others – no longer used the meat she mentioned above; instead she went for lamb or mutton which she got from halal butchers that had started appearing more widely in London in the 1980s:

But now we've got halal meat which is almost like the meat we get in Ghana<sup>112</sup>. ... Tastes much better to us. So I buy halal nowadays. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 222-226

Many others mentioned using halal meat too<sup>113</sup>, despite being Christians. Although Grace and some others (hhl, hhJ) now avoided the cheapest cuts of meat, there were still many Ghanaians who used them (e.g. hhB, hhF, hhH, hhN). Cheaper cuts of meat seemed to be trendy, perceived as delicacies by

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<sup>110</sup> The types and cuts of meat favoured by many Ghanaians were generally available only at a butcher's, not in a supermarket. I heard that some Ghanaians even went to farms or abattoirs directly to buy them more cheaply.

<sup>111</sup> Bush meat was often smoked and dried, although sometimes people used it fresh.

<sup>112</sup> The meat they had used regularly in Ghana was mutton, goat and beef, generally mixed with bush meat.

<sup>113</sup> The meat used in Ghanaian restaurants was halal too. For example, the meat available at one of the venues included: cow leg, tripe, goat, oxtail, chicken, hide, cow tongue, and goat head meat.

some, even by those with higher educational levels and those who were financially better off:

I always go to the butcher's in Deptford or Peckam. You buy the usual cow foot you know all those other delicacies which you use once in while. They also got this typical way of doing where they singe the fur off the goat. Have you seen it? You may not see one now because of all this foot and mouth disease but they used to have it with the skin on but it's been burnt off. So it looks smoky. So I buy that one too. That one is more expensive but I buy it. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 133

But I'll tell you what, if you cook pork now and you don't leave the rind on it, I wouldn't eat it. Because to me that's a delicacy. I mean I wouldn't go home and eat it practically everyday but when you cook it, make sure it's on there. James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1985-89

Although many of the cuts of meat that appeared regularly in soups and stews were not used in Ghana in the past to the same extent, or even at all<sup>114</sup>, they had come to symbolize Ghanaian food in London, in a similar fashion to some of the substitutes for staples. Stews or soups containing these cuts were, in fact, *more* Ghanaian than stews containing plain red meat or chicken. Perhaps Ghanaians who came to the UK in the early years had started the fashion unwittingly – mostly out of necessity – with latter migrants wanting to taste the same food as their predecessors. For example, Pauline explained how her sister, who had migrated to London earlier than her, had taught her about oxtail, cow foot and tripe, none of which she had in Ghana.

And I started eating so many foods that I used not to eat back home. Like oxtail and all those things, I never ate back home. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 195

The increase in the use of meat and other foods of animal origin after migrating is a common phenomenon in other migrant groups as well (den Hartog, 1995; Diner, 2001), but the extent to which Ghanaians preferred *cheap* and fatty cuts of meat is possibly different to the preferences of many others. Although some had learnt to avoid fat in London and trimmed meat before cooking it, most of the

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<sup>114</sup> I was told that tripe, for example, was usually consumed by people who slaughtered the animals. However, a pepper soup containing tripe was also fashionable at local palm wine shops (i.e. drinking places) in the past in Ghana.

stews and soups I was served seemed to have a high fat or oil content. Liberal use of cooking oil which was cheaper than in Ghana contributed to the oiliness of stews.

Palm oil must be mentioned in this context because although it was now widely available, some Ghanaians had learnt to avoid it because of its high saturated fat content contributing to higher cholesterol levels and, hence, hypertension, a problem Ghanaians seemed to be reluctant to accept but alarmingly many appeared to be affected by it<sup>115</sup>. James stated that in Ghana palm oil had been promoted as good for health (with high levels of vitamin A and E); here they received the opposite message.

Personally, for instance, I mean recently, I've literally gone off palm oil because of its high cholesterol level. We hardly touch it, probably once in a year or what is alright. James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 725

Although sauces were richer in meat content as compared to Ghana, this was not necessarily the case for vegetables. Ghanaians were used to using *fresh* ingredients and in London they lamented the poorer quality of their favourite fruit and vegetables, even the vital tomato. Plain meat stews were therefore popular and these seldom contained more vegetables than the basic ingredients, i.e. onions, tomatoes<sup>116</sup> and chilli peppers. Unless extra vegetables were served, then the intake would be relatively low.

Many of the traditional ingredients, such as chilli pepper, smoked, dried fish, and crabs imparted a distinct flavour and aroma to Ghanaian food and some preferred not to use many other condiments. Pauline indicated how she missed the taste of the rich stew her grandmother used to prepare with crab in it:

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<sup>115</sup> A number of informants indicated that either they had hypertension themselves, or they had a close relative or knew someone else who had it

<sup>116</sup> Tinned tomatoes and tomato puree were used in the UK in preference to fresh tomatoes which were not red enough, hence didn't provide the right colour to the final soup or stew.

I do miss that actually. Here it's more expensive and when you prepare it's not like back home. You don't get the taste that you really want. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 28

Yet, a few informants indicated that food in London was tastier than in Ghana because of all the extra seasoning they used here. Instead of, or in addition to, using traditional Ghanaian spices and herbs (available, but used only by a few) many opted for various spice-mixtures or sauces. Most of the additional seasoning contained salt, such as 'Maggi' or 'Knorr' cubes<sup>117</sup>. The flavour enhancer, monosodium glutamate, was used regularly by some, apparently being very popular among Ghanaians in London. Sodium bicarbonate was used for cooking beans (black-eyed beans) to make them softer, and for okra to make it slimier. Considering that some of the other ingredients used regularly contained a lot of salt, such as salt fish and salted pork, it is very likely that the sodium contents of many a stew and soup was high, contributing adversely to blood pressure levels.

### **5.1.2. From two- to three-part meals**

Although the use of various substitutes enabled the creation of Ghanaian meals with a similar format to that back home, it was possible to observe some changes in the meal format too. One significant modification was the transformation of a two-part meal consisting of a staple and a stew into a three-part meal, with an additional vegetable element. Some made a point of serving extra vegetables with the meal, either cooked or uncooked as a salad, especially if it was a plain meat stew. This occurred particularly in families in which the mother had been in the country for a long time and had had some training in Western style catering (Gloria, hhB; Grace, hhE). They had learnt the concept of serving vegetables

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<sup>117</sup> These cubes are now widespread in Ghana as well.

separately and possibly been more influenced by the discourse on what constitutes healthy food.

I like them because I think it's because I've done cookery. And I know it's the best thing for me, for us, for the body. And that's why I've eaten fruit and vegetables for so many years and I'm used to it. I must have a lot of fruit at home and vegetables. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 162

Grace had served additional cooked vegetables, such as carrots or cabbage, to the extent that a meal without them would not have constituted a proper meal for her anymore. The addition of vegetables in this fashion, which was very un-Ghanaian, was an indication of adjustment and a partly changed identity through a new way of thinking about the linkage between food and health or a healthy body. Usually Ghanaians didn't think in this fashion, i.e. they didn't link food with health, or conversely, ill-health with food.

We don't think our food has anything to do with our health. We don't look back [when we are ill] and see oh what did we eat. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 127

The way many Ghanaians thought, I was told, was that as long as they avoided anything poisonous they ate healthy food.

Another minor change in the meal format was the frequent replacement of fish as the centre of three-part meals with grilled or roasted chicken. This was linked with the fact that chicken was easily available and much more affordable than many of the special Ghanaian or African fishes preferred by Ghanaians. Furthermore, the replacement was easily done considering the fact that the components of the three-part meal were all separate, not like the meals containing stews or soups which were more content-specific.

## 5.2. Changes and variation in the content, structure and patterning of eating in Ghanaian households in London

The family is like the forest: if you are outside, it is dense; if you are inside, you see that each tree has its own position. (An Akan proverb)

In the following, I will look in more detail at the current food habits of Ghanaian migrants and their descendants and compare them with past practices. I will also examine the variation in habits among the households and informants. Apart from considering the meal format, the focus is on the eating pattern and meal cycle.

As indicated earlier, I involved 47 Ghanaians in 18 households in the study. Just under half of the informants were children still living at home with their parents, with an age range from 2 to 23 years. Eight of the 18 households were two-parent, and another eight were single-parent households with a female head (see Table 2.8 on p. 113). In three of the latter households, the partner or husband of the female head was living elsewhere. The first generation migrants in the households belonged to one of the following tribes: Ashanti, Fanti, Ga, Ewe, or Akuapim, with few being of mixed tribal background. Appendix C contains further details of the households.

### 5.2.1. The main eating events

#### *Dinner – the Ghanaian meal*

The evening meal in London was the main meal of the day in all households prepared by the woman of the household, which corresponded with the situation in Ghana. For the majority in London, it was the only hot meal of the day and normally eaten at home, although generally at a later time than in Ghana. As already indicated, and quite predictably (Anderson & Lean, 1995; Bradby, 1997; Darmon & Khlal, 2001; Kassam Khamis et al., 1996; Ruud, 1998; Wheeler & Tan, 1983), dinner for the first generation migrants was most of the time



characteristically Ghanaian. Furthermore, similarly to most South Asian migrants but unlike the general population (Anderson & Lean, 1995; Bush et al., 1998), evening meals were usually home-made, although they sometimes contained Ghanaian 'fast food', such as *kenkey*, and some convenience food for children.

Starters or desserts were not part of the usual meal format in most families. Some children had a sweet (e.g. yoghurt, biscuits, ice cream, or fruit) later on in the evening. The main course was based on the two- or three part structure described earlier, prepared with either original Ghanaian/African ingredients, or substitutes, or a mix of both.

... every day we eat a Ghanaian dish. And I don't prepare roasts, apart from today, every day we have [Ghanaian] - because I find that economical. And I find it tastier. I like my spicy food. Except when I do the stir fry but even that I put a lot of spices in it. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 711

Although chicken appeared frequently as the centre in three-part meals, and in some households, especially those which had been in the country for a long time, the two-part meal had become a three-part meal with additional vegetables (e.g. hhB, hhE, hhJ, hhM), the meals were otherwise recognizably Ghanaian.

Informants still seemed to prefer foods and cooking methods linked with their own tribal background, for example, *kenkey* was a favourite among the Fanti and Ga informants. *Kenkey* was indeed a very popular dish, mainly due to its convenience and relatively good availability:

It's like the nature of work people do is going to work and coming back home tired, you can't cook, both parents, even back home you find that people work, 'oh go round and get a kenkey', so you've always got kenkey I've got kenkey. ... It's there it's gotta be there you know for if you can't cook. You just grab it and put it in the oven or whatever and you go, you've got your fish and or sauce with it. Easy eating, you can have time to watch telly. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 45-6

Yet, despite the preference for old time favourites, informants regularly ate other dishes as well, making it more difficult to pinpoint ethnic differences in eating habits<sup>118</sup>.

For example, even more popular than *kenkey* was rice with either chicken, meat or fish stew (and possibly additional vegetables). This was the most frequently mentioned dish, although rice was far less widespread in Ghana in the past, some consuming it only on special occasions. In London rice and stew appeared to have become *the* standard Ghanaian dish, despite being an untraditional staple. The lack of Ghanaian/African ingredients in the early years meant that many got used to eating rice on a regular basis, even Ashantis. Contributing to its popularity was the relative ease of preparation, good availability, and most likely also the prestige it enjoyed in the past in Ghana.

Other staples which appeared regularly on the menu in many households included yam, plantain, and boiled potatoes, the latter being mentioned especially by those who had been in the country for a long time, and often disliked by more recent migrants. These staples were generally eaten with a stew, which was quicker to prepare than a soup. Serwa (hhM) mentioned some typically Ewe staples, but she stressed that she had them very infrequently.

*Fufu* and soup was mentioned by a relatively small number of informants, yet these included two Fantis who didn't like *fufu* earlier. Others eating *fufu* were of diverse ethnic backgrounds. It appeared that the substitute *fufu* had contributed to diminishing contrasts between ethnic groups. Apart from *kenkey*, it was the other regular staple that made a heavy meal. In fact, this latter aspect was one reason why *fufu* had lost its appeal for some Ashantis who in the past had eaten it regularly.

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<sup>118</sup> As a smaller number of households were analysed for current habits, this might have contributed to the less clear picture.

But I don't eat a lot of fufu now. ... It's too heavy. I find it too heavy. But I eat it about once every fortnight. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 238-42

For, although heavy food was still a favoured character of the main evening meal for many in London,

In the evenings I would like my kenkey, with black pepper, fish or any fried chicken, yeah, that's heavy. Robert (hhA, Ga, 35+, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 27-32

some, mostly women, implied that they did not like eating heavy food any more. The physical sensation of heavy food and the resulting satiety was still a source of pleasure but also of concern, especially for those who were worried about their weight. The Western discourse on slimness as a beauty and health goal had influenced Ghanaian women, although in Ghana the opposite (i.e. a corpulent body) had been the ideal. Concern for their weight, was a reason why some of the younger generation disliked eating *fufu* or other typical Ghanaian foods in the evening:

I hate it [fufu], it really makes you put on weight as well. It's just heavy and it goes straight into your bottom [Molly laughs]. Penelope (hhl, 22, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 504-8

I just find especially lets say Ghanaian foods it's a lot more *heavier* to eat that at night time than a pack of crisps, you know. Molly (hhl, 23, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 299

Trying to avoid heavy foods might explain why *banku* (the real thing or made from substitutes) featured as an evening meal only in one household, and why rice was so popular, the latter forming a 'lighter' meal. On the other hand, *banku* appeared to have become a weekend dish at least in some of the households.

Diminishing contrasts between ethnic groups was evidently also due to increasing variety: there were not only various Ghanaian dishes, but also an array of 'English' or 'European' and other ethnic dishes to choose from. These featured regularly as an alternative in some of the households, in others less so. Among those first generation migrants who tended to eat mainly Ghanaian food, fish and chips, or chicken (or sausages) and chips, were among the most frequently mentioned 'English' dishes. For a few informants, this was the only

'non-Ghanaian' food they ate or liked. Many saw English/European food as very bland, not hot enough, and very unexciting. Those with more or longer exposure to the host food culture, consumed a larger variety of dishes which they labelled 'English', such as roast chicken and potatoes, spaghetti Bolognese, pizza or curries.

Anything not Ghanaian we call English [laughs]. Of course we will call curry English food. We have curries a lot. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) <sup>1st</sup>, pg 13-15

These types of dishes have also been interpreted by other ethnic groups in the UK as part of the 'creolised' British cuisine (Caplan et al., 1998; Landman & Cruickshank, 2001; Wyke & Landman, 1997)<sup>119</sup>. This understanding of British food culture highlights the way in which it has been affected by transnational influences, and how Ghanaians living in London were not situated between mutually exclusive cultural systems (see also Harbottle, 2000: 129).

In a few cases, the 'English', or rather 'European', dishes were included in a weekly, cyclical, menu (hhB, hhJ, hhN, hhO) and appeared on certain days. These were all households with younger children, many of whom preferred eating 'English' food. In most of these households, parents sometimes or regularly ate the same food as the children. Serwa too, although her daughter was already grown up, indicated that some weeks she didn't eat any Ghanaian food: "Not because I don't want to but I just haven't had time to make it. So I don't bother." (Serwa; hhM, 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 216) She ate plain rice and stew a lot, but for her it was not really Ghanaian. She had been in the country for nearly 30 years and having trained in this country was well adapted to the mainstream food culture.

Increased variety was clearly linked with length of stay in the country, i.e. the longer the stay the more variety (more English/European dishes) as well as

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<sup>119</sup> Due to their popularity in many European countries, pizza and pasta (and other similar dishes) have become symbols of the host nation's food culture for many migrants, this being the case, for example, for Pakistanis in Norway (Ruud, 1998).

young children. In the two families in which the father was non-Ghanaian, there also appeared a larger variety of dishes. Both Frances (hhK) and Carol (hhO) regularly cooked their husbands' favourite dishes as well, Barbadian and Sierra Leonean, respectively. Increased variety was also linked with the experience of cooking English food at work: many Ghanaian women worked in canteens either as chefs or cooks, or as kitchen assistants.

It seemed also that Ghanaians with higher education favoured a more widespread choice of food and were ready to try new foods (e.g. John, hhJ; Serwa, hhM; Gladys, hhN), which corresponds with research carried out on other population groups as well (Bourdieu, 1984; Prättälä et al., 2003; Roos et al., 1996). As an example, John, who had a degree, was used to a larger variety of foods, partly due to his exposure to other food cultures through his former partner who was Indian. He enjoyed experimenting and tasting new things yet also liked a *variety* of Ghanaian food, as described here by his wife:

Like I say he doesn't eat fufu, so I have to pump him with all these things [chuckles] (ground) rice and dokono and ampesie and all this. I can eat my fufu and just sit down, I can't be bothered with anything any more. But he can't be eating the *same* food all the time, so variety comes in. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1461

In fact, Caroline preferred less variety, although in other households I got the impression that generally women were more prone to tasting and eating new things than their partners. Deborah spoke of her husband,

I just go and buy fish and chips and he doesn't like these things like the European food, he likes African food. Deborah (hhF, Fanti, 35+, 1988) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 135

who confirmed this statement when I interviewed him:

But my main meal basically what I like is fufu and kenkey. I can eat fufu and kenkey, like fufu with different soups, kenkey like with different .... The whole of the year, I couldn't be bothered. Maybe in between little bit of rice and stuff like that, but I can actually eat kenkey fufu kenkey fufu and I don't mind. Patrick (hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 90

Evidently, some Ghanaians still preferred *familiarity* and chose to eat the same food most evenings. This happened in hhG where they had *fufu* and soup regularly. The parents had been in the UK for seven years and their children who were in their late teens had only recently arrived from Ghana. Both parents were Ashanti and in this respect they fitted the popular conception of 'an Ashanti man has to have *fufu every day* otherwise he hasn't eaten the whole day'. In fact, many informants told of Ashantis they knew in the UK who had to have *fufu* every day. Grace's former husband was one of them:

Oh he was a typical African man. He wouldn't eat .. I mean if you gave him *fufu* three times a day he'd eat it. Sometimes he had *fufu* at eight o'clock in the morning. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 947

Robert (hhA) pointed out that he too preferred a limited variety of dishes, which suggests that men were keener on familiarity than most of the female informants. There is evidence from other research that migrant/ethnic minority men prefer eating more traditional food than women (Charon Cardona, 2004: 44; Sharma et al., 1999: 471).

There were a number of households in which children (or the second generation) ate most of the time what their parents did, i.e. characteristically Ghanaian dishes (hhA, hhE, hhF, hhH, hhl, hhG) including the occasional non-Ghanaian dish. In some of these households, children ate plain or simple Ghanaian dishes, such as rice and stew, but not the more 'typical' Ghanaian dishes, e.g. *kenkey*, indicating that they had not acquired the taste for such foods, partly due to poor availability in their childhood.

I mean the *main* food that we eat in this house is rice, rice and stew, rice and stew, sometimes yam. There's obviously a few foods that I don't eat, like akple and things like that. But ehm or *kenkey* because of the fermentation, I don't I don't really eat that. Emea (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 19

Another divider between the first and second generation migrants was the *amount* of chilli pepper they liked, although most children did eat hot food.

Pepper was basically one of the essential ingredients of typical Ghanaian food, but many parents had avoided pepper in the food they prepared for young children who, consequently, did not get used to the same levels as they did.

Sometimes when we go to other Ghanaians' houses they put a lot of pepper and, not always, I just can't eat it. But then their children are eating it as though there's nothing in it. It's probably the way I was brought up. 'Cos if I compare my mum with other Ghanaians' mums that I know, she doesn't eat a lot compared to them, but compared to me, she does [laughs]. Nicole (hhE, 17) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 471

Similarly, some Pakistani children in Norway did not want food which they considered to be too hot and spicy (Ruud, 1998: 181).

### ***Breakfast and lunch – English or European -style***

In London, many Ghanaians could not face eating the three full meals they had had in Ghana, and as is common among other migrant or ethnic minority groups (Anderson & Lean, 1995; Landman & Cruickshank, 2001; Wyke & Landman, 1997), tended to have a lighter breakfast and lunch, often consisting of English or European food.

I think I ate a lot, we ate a lot when we were back home. I don't know why. Maybe the quality, or we burn it off, of course we're not sitting in a lounge watching TV all the time as we do here, we burn it off. Because I can't see myself having those three meals a day I used to eat in Ghana. I can't do that here. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 239

Many even skipped the early morning meal altogether, the commonest meal to skip in other cultural contexts too (Pliner & Rozin, 2000). Some had a snack type food later in the morning – either at home or at work – or merely a beverage. Only people out of work (Grace, hhE; John, hhJ) or on sick leave (Evelyn, hhl) at the time of the study had something more substantial in the form of brunch, either something Ghanaian (e.g. Grace had had ground rice [i.e. *banku*], *shito* and sardines and white wine<sup>120</sup> the day before the interview) or a cooked English breakfast. Older children, especially girls in their late teens or early 20s, seldom

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<sup>120</sup> Informants usually had water or soft drinks with or after their meals, the latter indicating modified habits.

had breakfast, sometimes just a hot beverage. Hence they were behaving like many other Western youngsters (Pliner & Rozin, 2000). On the other hand, young children ate either cereal, or bread or toast and had a drink regularly, despite the morning rush.

Lack of time was a reason given by many for not eating anything in the morning, or for waiting until they got to work before having something. Lack of appetite was another reason, and with some this was linked with eating a heavy meal late the previous night, which I was told was a wider phenomenon in the community.

Because we haven't got time for you know people work so, do different kinds of job, come home about 10 o'clock and eat fufu, and then drop to sleep and then the following morning they (go back to work). Their habit is very bad. Elisabeth (hhQ, Ashanti, 49, 1972) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 73

Many of those who had a substantial breakfast in Ghana based on the two or three-part meals, indicated they did not have anything at all now, whereas those, mainly Fantis, who had enjoyed a lighter breakfast in Ghana, tea and bread, continued with this in London.

As in Ghana, lunch was most frequently eaten away from home. As it was based on food available in canteens or sandwich shops, the contents of the meal were 'English-style', i.e. very unlike that in Ghana, although it was usually a 'minor meal', which was the case for some in Ghana as well. Yet in contrast to Ghana, where lunch was always hot, in London it was more often a cold meal.

Many alternated between a packed lunch (e.g. sandwiches) and food from a canteen or a shop (e.g. pasta salad). For some, however, this was not necessarily the preferred option:



Pauline: Yeah when you're working you can't take your African food there so you're forced to have your sandwich or like the food. Like the chili con carne. ...

HT: You didn't bring in a flask or something

Pauline: No way no way no no no. No I remember once when I was working somewhere and a lady brought in gari, and these guys were 'what's that? How can you eat breadcrumbs?' And everybody started laughing. There's no way I take African food somewhere. Said breadcrumbs! So you are forced to like the (like jacket) potato and all the stuff they eat. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 169-171

Because ehm I know people who said 'I always take food from home, I'll take maybe some jollof rice, rice and stew, or some food in my flask and take it work.' I've never done it because I've always worked in places where ... I wouldn't feel comfortable doing that. So I've always gone with the flow, sandwiches n' .... Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 42

Not wanting to draw attention to their food habits in public, many Ghanaians did not take along typically Ghanaian food to work, although they would have liked to eat it. A few informants working in the public sector with a multicultural workforce (e.g. hospitals) indicated, however, that they sometimes took rice and stew with them – noticeably, not the most traditional of Ghanaian dishes.

Informants who were at home during the day or returned from work early usually had a hot meal. In most instances, this was rice and stew or some other basic Ghanaian dish (e.g. plantain and stew), possibly left over from the previous day or weekend. Some opted for more European style food:

or have something European, could be pasta with salad or eh anything what you call it Shepherds' pie with salad on the side. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 68

Gloria indicated that if she had to prepare something during the week she would resort to international convenience food, such as pies and pizzas:

And mostly during the week we tend to have European dishes more than our own food. One, because it's quicker. And two, it's already made. Bung it in the oven and that's it. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 75

This was food she prepared for the children in her care and for her own children returning from school, and would sometimes eat it as well.

Buying convenience food regularly – either at work or at home – was one of the subtle indicators of a family being better off and happened more often in families

that had been in the country for longer. A further indicator of household income was whether or not the child or children in the family received free school meals. In three single-parent households, children were entitled to free school meals. However, in only one case (Kwame, hhA, 11), the child had a hot meal every day, such as hamburger, chips and a drink. In the other two cases (Nicole, hhE, 17; Laura, hhH, 12) the children maintained that the meal token wasn't enough for a complete meal:

Ehm with the tokens, because things are really expensive in the canteen anyway, on the tokens, I'd probably be able to get chips and a bottle of water. That's about all I could afford, unless I take more money to school. Nicole (hhE, 17) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 246

### *Snacks*

Snacks in between meals were generally mentioned by the first generation migrants only after I specifically asked about these. Falk sees snacking as non-ritual eating, which is not categorised as 'eating' (Falk, 1994) and, consequently, as Mintz argues, less likely to be remembered (Mintz, 1985; see also Sutton, 2001: 121).

Whereas in Ghana a snack consisted most commonly of fresh fruit<sup>121</sup>, roasted plantain and nuts, or the like, in London it was more frequently a hot beverage and/or biscuits, sometimes fruit. In many households the consumption of fruit appeared to be very low, although there were a few exceptions.

On the whole, snacks didn't appear to be regular events for first generation informants either in Ghana or in London, although some consumed them more frequently than others. In other words, for Ghanaians the focus was still on the main meals, even if they had been reduced in size and number.

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<sup>121</sup> In Ghana, fruit, which was either available to pick directly from surrounding trees or bought from a street vendor, was affected by seasonal variation.

Many of the offspring, however, admitted having snacks in between meals, which was very much like other migrant or ethnic minority children (Harbottle, 2000; Koctürk, 1995). Older children with money of their own, bought crisps and/or chocolate on the way home from school/college or, if working, enjoyed them at work. Younger ones had a snack after coming home.

***Weekend – the best of both worlds***

In accordance with habits of other migrants and ethnic minority groups, and those of the wider population, the weekend was the time for more special food, or food that had not been consumed during the week. Similarly to some households in Ghana, breakfast was more substantial than during the week, the typical English breakfast being a favourite in some households. In regard to the main meal of the day, similarly to Ghana, most households prepared soup; any of the basic soups (lightsoup, groundnut, palmnut or okrasoup), not specifically groundnut or palmnut soup as in Ghana. Soup was eaten with either *fufu*, *emutuo* or *banku*. The latter two had acquired the status of weekend food, yet *emutuo* (with palm soup) had this position already in Ghana.

Another feature of weekends in some households was the abundance of Ghanaian dishes and choice. This was linked with the fact that food was cooked in bulk over the weekend for the week ahead. In hhO the variety of dishes was perhaps greater than in others because of the preparation of Sierra Leonean stews as well, commonly eaten with rice. However, because Carol's mother was living with them, Ghanaian dishes were prominent too:

Most Sundays we eat any staple food like kenkey, banku, fufu. That sort of thing. And jollof rice at times with it. So I cook maybe four, five different types. And the kids like what they want to eat. They like maybe the kenkey or some okra stew. One of them will like maybe cassava leaf and rice because their dad will eat it. Or they will like the kenkey and the pepper 'cos Dad is eating it. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 282

I'll prepare lamb soup and I'll prepare chicken stew. And I'll prepare a fish stew with spinach in it. I'll divide all of them into two. Put some in the fridge for over the weekend and maybe Monday and Tuesday, and then bring the other half out. Then it will be just myself and my husband that eats that. And we'll eat the soup with the fufu and the stew with rice or with yam or with potatoes or with kenkey. So that is there for whatever time or whatever one fancies with the other European dishes that goes on in the house as well. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 226

Households that tended to have both English/European and Ghanaian food throughout the week, focused on having Ghanaian dishes at the weekend.

And ehm I mean personally, we always have an African food, a Ghanaian food on a Saturday, for the reason it takes longer to cook and it's more convenient, I have more time on a Saturday. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1st, pg 46

However, it was also these households that made a point of having a typically *English* meal at the weekend too, a Sunday roast, at least as an option, like some of the other households as well (hhA, hhB, hhD, hhl, hhJ, hhM, hhN, hhP).

Sundays we try to have something special, something different, so roast beef, roast lamb, lamb chops, potatoes and vegetables, you know. Because during the week, we haven't got time. So, Sundays we are all home yeah. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1220-8

But if I know Emefa was going to be home this Sunday and I'm off I'll ask her and if she's home we'll have roast chicken like the English have it with stuffing and all. And she loves it. And I love it. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 902

A dessert was more likely to follow this kind of an English meal too:

Maybe Sunday roast yes we'll probably have an apple pie and go all the way, but apart from that there's no desserts in this house. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 92

It appeared that a roast dinner was especially favoured in Fanti households, yet not limited to them. Some emphasised that they prepared it in a different fashion to the typical English version:

... obviously the way our Mum makes it it's totally different to what an English person would eat. Molly (hhl, 23, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1030

However, the format of the meal was still more English than Ghanaian, based on the English notion of a proper meal, i.e. meat, potatoes and vegetables (and gravy) (Charles & Kerr, 1988), the meat being the centre piece.

The practice of preparing the archetypal English meal, even with modifications, is unlike many other migrants or ethnic minority groups who focus on their own food culture at weekends (Borda, 1987). On the other hand, Harbottle noticed among Iranian families that they too sometimes had a Sunday roast (Harbottle, 2000: 142).

It could be argued that because of the lack of elaborate recipes or dishes in the traditional Ghanaian cuisine, those Ghanaians who were keen on further variety were obliged to make use of other culinary cultures when they wanted something out of the ordinary. Since heavy food was no longer a must, foods and dishes of other 'lighter' cuisines were permissible. The reason why in particular *English/British* food was opted for – despite the gastronomic plurality of the multicultural city – is, I believe, because many Ghanaians had hybrid identities already back in Ghana and thought of the food of the former colonial rulers as part of their own culture – at least elements of it – if they had the means to get hold of it. In the past in Ghana, roasting of meat and other typically English food was linked with wealthier families<sup>122</sup> (e.g. hhB, hhl). In London, due to much less expensive meat (especially chicken), the ideal roast dinner, symbolising advancement and prosperity, was accessible to all. The practice of serving this kind of food reflected also parents' aspirations that their children internalized some of the typically British food as their own and became accustomed to the wider British society.

And Sundays for the children's sake I'm (more) likely to have a traditional English lunch. A roast beef or a roast lamb or something like that. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 46

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<sup>122</sup> Similarly, in the past in Iran, roast meats were restricted to the wealthy and the imperial court whose kitchens were equipped with ovens, unlike those of the wider population (Shaïda, 1992). With the spread of ovens in modern kitchens, roast dishes have become more popular.

### *Christmas – turkey and trimmings*

The roast dinner also featured strongly at Christmas in London. In many households it was the main festive meal. This occurred also in families which adhered mainly to Ghanaian food throughout the year.

Grace: The *only time* I prepare a non-Ghanaian dish is Christmas time. I prepare a typical English dish. ...

HT: So what would that mean. You were saying turkey or?

Grace: Turkey. I make two different first courses. Like soup or cocktail, fruit cocktail. And then whoever wants the cocktail and fruit cocktail, sometimes I have melon and glace cherries and things like that for first course. And sometimes I have melon and then I have grapefruit, whichever people like when we have guests. And then we'll have the main course with all the trimmings. Carrots, that Christmas veg, what is it, sprouts.

HT: Brussels sprouts.

Grace: Yeah. Oh about three or four different veg. And I go in for all [laughs]. And then about two or three different puddings. Sweets. ... And we have Christmas pudding and gateaux. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 711, 873-87

Serving a typical English Christmas dinner was contrary to past habits in Ghana, when the focus was still on typical Ghanaian dishes, albeit prepared with more meat (especially chicken) in them. A change in the format of meals was hence apparent, as the meal structure was that of a proper festive English meal, with the inclusion of starters and desserts, the main course following also a more complex structure to that of a typical Ghanaian meal. The blasé manner in which some informants talked about food at Christmas suggested that they had begun to think of the traditional British roast as part of their own food culture.

Well Christmas is more or less like what the English people do. I go to my Mum's for Christmas dinner which she does. And it's a normal turkey, potatoes, sausage you know the small ones. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 188

The practice of serving the food of the majority culture was also contrary to many other migrant or ethnic minority groups, who focus on their own culinary tradition at festive times, especially if family relatives are expected to join in (see Bush et al., 1998). For example, the large majority of first generation South Asian

Muslims studied by Kassam Khamis ate traditional foods at the 'Eid' festival at the end of Ramadan (Kassam Khamis et al., 1996).

The typical English Christmas dinner may have featured on the menus of the educated elite in Ghana in the colonial period, as this was the case in Nigeria, where they favoured turkey, minced pies and puddings (Ikpe, 1994). It was perhaps an ideal typical model in the informants' minds in London; yet, children and visitors seemed to be the main motive for the very un-Ghanaian meal. Gloria (hhB) pointed out that because children spoke about festive times at school, they felt compelled to follow British traditions, so that they wouldn't feel left out of anything. Children have also been the main cause in other migrant communities to serve the traditional food of the host nation at Christmas time (Borda, 1987).

Grace, who had family around for Christmas like many other households, prepared the meal as a treat for her step son and his friend who didn't live with her and, having recently arrived from Ghana, weren't accustomed to English food:

Because a lot of these boys, they have nobody and because they've come from Africa and their parents are not here so they come to (this place). So I try and give them typical English food, show them, typical English food [laughs] at Christmas. On Christmas day. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 927

She actually prepared a hot pepper sauce for them too, adding a central Ghanaian element to the meal, making the food in this fashion more palatable and acceptable.

Because a lot of Ghanaians can't eat turkey on it's own with a sauce, turkey sauce. So they need something hot. So I put that on the side as well, and they eat it. They take and put it on the turkey. Because a lot of Ghanaians can't eat English food. But if there's hot pepper, they'll eat it. ... It's just they're' so used to African food they can't eat English food because it's not tasty enough to Africans. Not spicy enough. ... I mean they don't eat cranberry sauce. It's only my daughter and myself. She's the only one that has cranberry sauce and myself. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 915-19

Despite eating Ghanaian food regularly throughout the year in the evenings, the fact that Grace was able to eat cranberry sauce with her turkey meant that her

taste buds had adjusted to quite a different flavour principle (Rozin, 2000) and that she had made a “shift to the cultural assumptions of the of the country of destination” (Bush et al., 1998: 371).

In other families, the typically English Christmas meal was reserved mainly for the children while parents went for traditional Ghanaian food:

We don't have any special Christmas things. Because it's the same as everything (or every day) else. But because of them I normally make some turkey as well. Just for them to sort of get that concept. But I normally at Christmas like goat meat. Because it reminds me of back home what we do on that day. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1479

### 5.2.2. The ‘pick n’ mix’ generation

And even when I was at work someone commented on it as well. I was giving them their change and they said, ‘how do you eat fufu with those nails?’ And I said ‘How do you know I’m a Ghanaian?!’ [laughs] and he was like ‘I just know’, and I was like ‘it’s true’, I’d rather use a spoon and eat it like that. Emeffa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 282

Focusing further on the second generation, most children were of mixed ethnic, or tribal, background, although in a few households the parents were from the same tribe<sup>123</sup>. Unlike their parents, they didn’t seem to identify themselves with any Ghanaian tribe but identified themselves rather as British Ghanaians and/or Black British. As is common for the offspring of migrants, they had shifting identities depending on the context, time and their age, which affected their food habits (Caplan et al., 1998; Harbottle, 2000). Harbottle has called the changing identities and food preferences of the second generation part of ‘pick ‘n mix’ cultures, in which new social identities may evolve through exposure to different cultural systems (2000: 140).

Ghanaian offspring appeared to go through three main phases. Young children ate Ghanaian food quite happily – provided it was offered to them – until they

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<sup>123</sup> In one household where I involved the children, the father was from Sierra Leone. In one household there was a foster child of Caribbean origin.



went to school and wanted the same as everybody else in class. Lillian talked about her 11-year old son:

But now he complains it's too much pepper, there's this there's that. I don't like this I don't like that. I think it's part of growing up. [laughs] Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 165

As they grew older and became more culturally aware – in their teens – and possibly fed up with (bland) school food, they started identifying again with Ghanaian/African culture and turning back to Ghanaian/African food.

He liked the Ghanaian food, then suddenly went off it, when he was going out with his mate you know when he was 14 15 .... And now he's suddenly come round to it, he's living in his own flat, in Abbey Wood, but he always wants to come around 'oh Mommy what are you cooking today?' Yesterday he phoned and I said 'oh I'm having roast lamb.' 'Oh I don't want roast lamb then I'm not coming, I thought you'll be making some fufu.' Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 78-82

Yet, as already indicated, young women generally maintained an ambivalent attitude towards Ghanaian food, as it was a source of pleasure but also of concern because of fears of weight gain.

Parents reacted to the various stages their children went through in different ways. Some parents had distanced themselves from Ghana, and enhanced their children's 'British' (or non-Ghanaian) identity by introducing English/European (or other ethnic) food not only at Christmas or weekends, but also in the everyday weekly menu (e.g. hhB, hhM, hhN, hhO, hhP), possibly eating it themselves as well (hhB, hhM, hhN)

So maybe by Wednesday then we go on to spaghetti, Friday we probably have a chips and chicken drumsticks or beefburgers or something English. So normally ... by Sunday it will be more often Ghanaian as the week gets to the end. Then it becomes more convenient food, easier to cook which will be more British or non-Ghanaian. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>/2, pg 22

In the morning before they go to school they have their corn flakes, their weetabix, rice crispies, they come home in the evening, either have rice and stew or pie, chips or pizza. And before they go to bed they have a drink. And this goes on like that. We eat more rice and stew. And weekends we eat yam, potatoes, with cornbeef stew or fish stew. As I'm saying we're Fantis. And then on Sundays, the children will eat brunch, which is sausages, bacon, chips and in the evening the parents, well the father and the mother well I might have fufu. I like my fufu Sundays with chicken groundnut soup. ... Otherwise the children will have a roast, roast chicken. Sometimes they don't want to eat the fufu, you know they can have a choice, they can have their roast potatoes and cabbage and things like that. Henry (hhB, Fanti, 65+, 1960s) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 5

The importance of Ghanaian culture had diminished to a certain degree in these families, parents as well as children adhering more to 'British traditions' in other spheres of life as well, aspiring for greater assimilation<sup>124</sup>. Unlike Iranian women in Harbottle's (2000: 152) study none of the Ghanaian parents actually expressed concern about their children losing their Ghanaian identity, perhaps largely because they had hybrid identities themselves.

Other Ghanaian families, nevertheless, stuck mainly to the food and dishes they knew from Ghana, providing less frequently other types of meals (hhA, hhE, hhG, hhH, hhl, hhL). As Molly expressed, Ghanaian meals were actually crucial to her Ghanaian identity:

I wouldn't feel Ghanaian if I actually didn't eat the foods, 'cos I don't speak the language. The only part of the Ghanaian culture I still have is basically is the food. The fact we eat the food every single day but apart from that we don't speak the language, don't go to any Ghanaian association dos, hardly go to Ghana, so it's only the food that really makes us Ghanaian. Molly (hhl, 23, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1136

The fact that very many Ghanaian children in London didn't speak their parents' language (or languages) was a further sign of their parents' assimilation, or unwillingness to demonstrate their cultural background – especially in public<sup>125</sup>. However, as eating within the boundaries of the home was well and truly a

<sup>124</sup> As an example, Gladys (hhN) enjoyed playing golf, which is perceived as a typical white man's game. Gloria (hhB) on the other hand was a registered childminder and had also white British children in her care, which meant that in her family they tried to smooth out their Ghanaian manners and traditions. Furthermore, Gloria had been a chef in a staff canteen in her previous occupation, preparing typically English/European food.

<sup>125</sup> The role of English as the official language in schools in Ghana, especially in the past, contributed to this as well. The fact that some parents spoke English to each other because of different tribal backgrounds was another reason for children learning only one language.

private matter, it was possible to continue eating the traditional way, and therefore food remained for the second generation one of the only means of imagining their 'Ghanaian' identity. Quite rightly it has been stated that food habits are one of the last realms to change after migrating to a new host country.

Perhaps like some other West African migrant groups, but unlike many others, a number of Ghanaian children in the UK were exposed predominantly to Ghanaian food when they were very small, because either they stayed on in Ghana when their parent/s migrated, joining them later (e.g. hhG, hhN, hhO), or they were sent back to Ghana to be looked after by relatives before returning to the UK for the start of school. For example, Lillian's (hhA) three year old son had already been there over a year at the time of the study and was going to return after another 16 months. Similarly, Patricia (hhF, 8) was only 18 months when she was taken back to Ghana and returned three years later. Although a pragmatic solution to childcare and financial constraints, many parents explained the practice as wanting to expose the child to Ghanaian culture and the extended family. Patricia definitely liked Ghanaian foods better than her younger siblings and – unlike them – spoke Fanti with her mother.

Sending children back home was nothing new or recent, as fostering has a long tradition both in Ghana and among Ghanaians abroad (Goody, 1975). In the early years in the UK, Ghanaian children were regularly fostered out to English families (Craven, 1968; Stapleton, 1978a; Stapleton, 1978b). In this manner, they were cut off from Ghanaian culture and gained more of an English/British identity, including a taste for 'plain' English food. This happened to one of Grace's daughters who returned to live with her mother at the age of 16<sup>126</sup>:

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<sup>126</sup> Although Grace fostered her first daughter as well, she was sent to Ghana at the age of two. When she returned to London at the age of 16 she was used to hotter food than her mother.

When she came back she couldn't eat my food [laughs]. She didn't like my food at all! So I had to try and cook the English way for her. She didn't like my food. She said it was too hot and too much tomatoes for her. And too heavy for her. (But now she likes it). I think now she's used to it. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 627.

Considering that siblings grew up in different environments in their childhood, Ghanaian households were truly sites of diverse identities and consumption practices.

To what extent young adults actually ate Ghanaian food, depended on various factors, for instance, whether they still lived at home, where they received cooked meals, or had moved to live on their own.

I'll ring like Laura [half-sister] and say can you get auntie P to do a Ghanaian 'cos I fancy Ghanaian food, and I'll make the effort of eating it, but it's not like .. I guess it's becoming more and more now, as I get older, but it used to be like once in a blue moon now it's like once a week, that I'll do a Ghanaian or get somebody to do it, Ghanaian, so I can eat Ghanaian food .. I mean the only reason why we don't eat it all that often is because of the preparation aspect and the health aspect. I don't find it particularly healthy like I told you so that's why you know we wouldn't do it that often 'cos otherwise, God (*inaudible*) put on enough weight. Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 4869-85

It seemed that if they had to prepare meals for themselves, they ended up combining the two main cultures<sup>127</sup> they were exposed to, resulting in *hybrid* food or meals:

... we do an *Anglicised* Ghanaian food and ... you know Ghanaian food Anglicised and English food Ghanaianized if you can imagine 'cos like it's like combining the two cultures and we've come up with our own way of doing things. Lisa (hhC, 30, 1980) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 716

I think in a way, I've mixed the two, I've mixed African into English, like I've brought the hot .. hot foods *into* the English foods that I eat, so I think in a way I've found a compromise. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 21

The *hybrid* meals were part of a new food culture, of young British Ghanaians. Their meals were characterised by simpler, less lengthy cooking methods, lack of original Ghanaian ingredients, and the use of more English/European vegetables. None of the young adults attempted making *fufu* or any of the other typically Ghanaian staples; instead they opted for rice or pasta, which had acquired a non-

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<sup>127</sup> What must be kept in mind is that the two main food cultures, both English/British and Ghanaian, were not 'pure' but already influenced by other food cultures.

ethnic status due to their ubiquitous use by many other people. The Ghanaian facet of the meal was retained primarily through the meal format, but also through the use of the basic ingredients for sauces, by following some – if not all – of the fundamental cooking rules, and through the use of spices which they had become accustomed to since childhood:

There's a pepper called shito that yeah my mum used to have it on her plate, so I used to come to her to eat from her plate, and she'll be like it's hot, it's hot, and I used to *eat* it and eat it and eat it so, it became really, like I became immune to it, and I *really* like it, and even when I'm cooking that has influenced my cooking, because even when I'm making pasta or anything like that, I tend to put a lot of curry powder or you know chili sauce and things like that. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 21

Although not all spices were the same as used by their parents, or in Ghana, they gave the dishes a characteristically hot sensation which the youngsters perceived as typically Ghanaian. In this sense, the role of spices was more central to them than the staple in the continuation of a food custom, which contradicts Kocktürk's (1995) notion of the unimportance of accessory foods, such as spices, for the survival of a food tradition<sup>128</sup>.

Young British Ghanaians appeared to have a much more flexible attitude in regard to their African heritage than their parents and were willing to identify with other black African and Caribbean cultures as well, partly because they had friends from these backgrounds. They also found these cuisines quite appealing.

And then I tend to get a lot of them West Indian takeaways as well. Like salt fish patties, vegetable patties. Penelope (hhl, 22, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 205-9

Ehm a lot of my friends are Nigerian, and then after Nigerian I'd say Ghanaian and then everybody .. Indian, white, everything yeah, West-Indian, I have a lot of West Indian friends as well. So we all, I think we all mix and match really, I eat a lot of West Indian foods ... Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 274

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<sup>128</sup> Instead, Elizabeth and Paul Rozin's 'flavour principles', olfactory and gustatory complexes typical of a given cuisine, seem to be at practice here, "making a dish recognizable and therefore acceptable even if some of the other ingredients are alien to the system." (Fischler, 1988: 287)

Another reason why Emefa liked West Indian food was that she had been to a Jamaican childminder when she was small. Yet, she also frequented a Nigerian café/take-away quite regularly:

They have pounded yam which is fufu ... They have everything: beans, rice and beans, I don't eat the rice and beans, but they've got everything there. But .. I mean it's really nice to go there. I usually go on social occasions as well, 'cos it's nice to just be with your friends and eat you know African foods there. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 258-70

Interestingly, however, none of the young adults had been to a Ghanaian restaurant with their friends. This was unlike second generation South Asians who have been found to eat, apart from fast food, South Asian food when dining out (Kassam Khamis et al., 1996).

Despite the flexibility in their identities, and the cultural ambivalence towards food and cooking (see chapter 6), some of the youngsters indicated that Ghanaian food was their preferred option in the future when establishing their own households, although they would allow other influences as well.

Frances: I prefer Ghanaian food more to English food, I wouldn't cook English food. It would be the only odd day.

Angela: Yeah if I had children or something I would like prepare, be like Mum basically, and like cook English *and* Ghanaian. Frances (hhB, 16) & Angela (hhB, 19) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 640-2

I will try to make Ghanaian food, I would. At least the basic stew just tomatoes and just a bit. I will *try* to make it, and I'll also have them with pasta. So I would always try to incorporate the Ghanaian influence you know within my meal, I would say I never eat English foods, never, no. I would try to make Ghanaian food or what I thought to be Ghanaian food. Molly (hhl, 23, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1039

A similar view was held by Chinese youth in London, who expressed a preference for Chinese food although there were certain English foods that they specially enjoyed (Wheeler & Tan, 1983). As Harbottle notes, "youth is a transitional and liminal period during which there may be considerable freedom to 'play' with identity-formation, but this may not necessarily be sustained in later life." (Harbottle, 2000: 145)

### 5.3. The social context of meals

The previous sections have already pointed out diverging consumption patterns within Ghanaian households in London, children often eating different foods from their parents, a common phenomenon in other migrant or ethnic minority families as well (Valentine, 1999). If we look at the social context of the main meal (evening, weekend) more carefully within households, joint family meals around a table appeared to be the exception. Parents ate together with their children on a regular basis in only a very few families. In hhN it happened every day, yet in hhB it happened only on Sundays, and even then parents did not sit together with children around the same table or even in the same room. In other households, eating together, or simultaneously, wasn't planned, but rather something that occurred only if everyone happened to be home at the same time:

Yeah if we are all at home, we sit down otherwise, yeah. Otherwise, you know, we eat as people alone, whoever if you are ready you take your food and eat and that's it. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1360

We hardly ever sit down together because we've all got such different lifestyles, we really have. Penelope (hhl, 22, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 62

And then I go there and eat and come. So I don't actually have a meal with Emefa every day. You know even though we're here we don't have a meal together, but as long as I know there's food in the fridge and there's food in the freezer, I don't worry about whether she's eaten or not, because I know if she's hungry she'll eat, she's 21. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1153-7

Furthermore, if all family members happened to have a meal at the same time, they did not necessarily eat together in the same space or room.

Sometimes Kwame eats before I do sometimes I eat before he does. But I always sit at the table and eat, but he likes to watch telly and eat at the same time. So he normally sits here on the carpet and eats. ... The only time he will sit at the table is when he's having his cereal. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 234

But the children, they normally, they tend to eat in their rooms more because they've got the tellie and everything in their rooms, you know, so they just take their food and go upstairs. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 1368

The only family members who seemed to eat together regularly were young children, like in hhJ and hhF. In hhJ children sometimes ate with their father but not their mother:

It's me who is never at the table! But whoever is hungry and if all of them are hungry and the Dad is hungry, they all go and sit on the table and I serve them. It's never me! I'm the one who's never ever with them at the table. I prefer them to finish eating before me actually. I enjoy my food *more* [laughs] when they've finished eating. I don't know why! So nobody will come to me and ask me for meat which they tend to do. So when I've fed them all then I sit down to eat, then nobody will come near me, then I eat, I like it that way. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 2357-65

As Caroline indicated, some even *preferred* eating alone than in the company of others.

Christmas was one of the few occasions when effort was placed on eating together in most households. This went together with the English style Christmas dinner cooked in many families and represented, hence, their acquired English identities.

As seems to be common in migrant households (Ruud, 1998) and other families with children (DeVault, 1991; Valentine, 1999), different schedules, activities and tastes of family members meant that home was a site of multiple consumption practices for the Ghanaian families. Yet differences did not occur only between adults and children, but also between adult partners. As already indicated, many had different tastes which were partly attributed to diverse ethnic backgrounds and length of stay in the country. None of the adult partners arranged to share a meal together.

HT: When you're here with your husband would you make a thing of it that you sit together sometimes?

Carol: No. We don't. I eat whenever and if he's eating and I want to discuss something I can sit down, but it doesn't mean I have to eat too. And if he's eating something the kids like they'll go and eat with him. But it's not the matter they have to wait for him or he has to be there at a certain time to eat, he can eat whenever. And anybody can dish up what they want when. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1629-31



What was striking about the situation in Ghanaian households was that none of the adult partners even *aspired* to eat together, or with their children as a family. They did not mind eating at different times, or in different spaces within the home, and found this quite normal, not worth discussing at length. The joint evening meal seemed not to be part of Ghanaian culture in Britain. In this fashion, Ghanaian households differed from many British and other Western families with children who *ideally* would like to eat together, at least for the main meal of the day, and lament if they are not able to do so, as several qualitative studies have shown (Holm, 2001a). In other cultural contexts too, shared meals are seen as an important part of family life. This is, for example, the case among migrant and ethnic minority families of Muslim background in the UK (and elsewhere), whose religion encourages commensality<sup>129</sup> (see Ruud, 1998).

The social organisation of eating in Ghanaian households in London was, nevertheless, in many ways similar to that in Ghana in the past, despite the change in social and physical environments. Migration had not altered the basic relations between family members, although it had added more constraints and pressures, and ironed out differences between households. In Ghana, if focusing on the weekday evening meal, family members seldom ate all together at the same time and in the same place. In fact, there was quite a variation in the social contexts of eating when comparing the different households as described by informants. Eating arrangements turned out to be a clearer indicator of social status than the food itself.

In less affluent households in Ghana, the father ate at the same time but separately from other family members:

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<sup>129</sup> The Prophet of Islam emphasised the importance of company when he said "Eat together and not separately, for the blessing is associated with the company." (Ibn Majah)

My father ate alone. Inside the house. Because my father had a small shop so my father ate alone and all the girls ate with my mother (on the veranda). There were five girls who ate with my mother in a big pot. And then the boys had their own little bowls. And the fufu was shared, and if it's ampesie it was shared. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 217

Sometimes you don't even sit and eat with your parents, especially in Accra, my father gets his food separately, the kids get their food, maybe your father will eat with your mum but not the kids. Robert (hhA, Ga, 35+, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 663

None of these families had a dining table. Women ate in the kitchen, which was their domain and where they could keep an eye on the hearth. Men, on the other hand, ate in some other part of the living quarters (see Goody, 1982: 86).

Most of the wealthier households possessed a big dining table, a legacy of colonialism. However, eating did not necessarily occur around it. Fanti families appeared to use the table most frequently, although one such family used it only at the weekend:

... the kids, we had what it's like a *long* table of shorter tables and chairs for the children. And then mum and dad will have the big table. Yeah but we all sit together. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 83

Many families still preferred using little stools and tables, which could be easily moved around, generally sitting outside where it was cooler. Furthermore, as many of the fathers of upper class families came home late from work, they seldom enjoyed the meal at the same time with other family members (see Oppong, 1974).

The predominant image is us leaving his food there, and then we finishing, we eating, and he'll come back and have his meal later on, and we hang hovering around and watching to see the one who will go and clear the table. Then he always leaves something in there for us [laughs], and no matter how much you have eaten getting that leftover from my Dad was a special thing. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 113

As this quote depicts, children generally ate together earlier, often with their mother, either at the table or sitting on little stools. The father had his meal after returning home, most likely at the table. Maids ate in the kitchen. In some households, traditions were held onto even when both parents were present:

My dad sat alone in the dining hall, and we had to sit in the kitchen. I just don't understand it. ... He's never eaten with mum. My Mum was always like eating with us. Pauline (hhH, Ga/Fanti, 36, 1987) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 81

Thus, it appears that family meals as understood in the Western context were not a goal in Ghana in the past. In other words, company was not seen as essential for a proper meal. The main thing was that everyone *had* a meal, as expressed here by Serwa:

So in a way, family meals are not a big thing, but making sure that you know the family has had a meal, sometime, is more important than being together. Because you'll always know where somebody is. You'll know that they've gone out and not come back, or you know that you know something has held them up, and ... So in a way yes we have meals together, but it's not eh. Because we don't have a meal and then it's finished. The meal will be there. Somebody anybody that comes up after we've eaten they'll still have a meal. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1101-09, 1137

In London, despite eating more Western food than in the past, little attempt was made to eat more in a Western manner. However, particular families which incorporated European food in the weekly menu also managed to congregate around a table regularly. Higher educational levels, on the other hand, were not automatically reflected in better living conditions and more space as seemed to be the case in Ghana. As housing was low on the list of priorities, many families lacked appropriate room for a large dining table, although most had some sort of a smaller table. Households with a large table were ones that were used to having one already in Ghana. Whether it was in active use or not was another matter.

The social context of eating in Ghana, as well as in London, can be understood better if one considers the traditional set-up of matrilineal Akan (e.g. Ashantis, Fantis, Nzemas) and patrilineal Ga families based commonly on duolocality, and the meaning of cooking in marriage as discussed in the next chapter<sup>130</sup>. Traditionally men did not even eat in the same house as their spouses, but received food from their wives who lived with their kin (see Clark, 1994). This

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<sup>130</sup> Among the patrilineal Ewes, residence is either patrilocal or virilocal (Nukunya, 1992).

practice is similar to that among the Bantu studied closely by Richards who contended that

the most honourable form of hospitality is to send a man dishes of porridge and relish, a lump of meat, or a calabash of beer so that he can dispose of it as he pleases in his hut alone. The least honourable is to ask him to share in your dish, in what would seem to us a more friendly and convivial manner. (Richards, 1939:135)

Along these lines, in Ghana in the past, as well as in present-day London, allowing men to eat alone, or in a separate space, was actually bestowing them respect and honour. Eating alone did not make the meal less proper. This is contrary to many a Western idea of a 'real' meal requiring company (Mäkelä, 1996; Sobal, 2000).

Consequently, men had a separate bowl even if other family members shared one (e.g. mother and daughters). The sharing of a bowl between young couples wasn't appropriate, as clarified by one key informant. He also referred to the significance of the way in which food was served:

... and you decorate it [the bowl] nicely and you cover it nicely, and the table is set .. and the water is by it and then I go and sit gorgeously, and the whole ritual of lifting the lid, putting this there, washing my hand ... it gives me a sense of fulfilment, it's a ritual, for me to know that my wife really really loves me and cares about me. But if you eat in the same bowl, what happens to that feeling of being cared for, being loved, nurtured, being fed. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 8

The sharing of a bowl between the mother and her children, for example, was seen as an opportunity to teach children the proper way of eating, i.e. with fingers. However, it didn't occur in every household in Ghana in the past.

In London, none of the informants indicated sharing a bowl regularly with anyone else, although it occurred sometimes between friends and family members at social gatherings, symbolising union. Different tastes of parents and children contributed to the use of individual bowls. Because children didn't practice eating, for example *fufu* and soup, regularly, some felt uneasy using their fingers:

I don't feel comfortable, 'cos like my nails are quite long as well, I don't feel comfortable sitting in a social place, trying to eat you know, food with my hands and. Everybody's there they just eat it so *professionally* and you know so fast n' I just feel conscious that people are going to look at me and be like oh 'cos she's a bush girl [laughs], why is she you know, what is she doing, so I don't. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 282

Eating with fingers had nevertheless remained the popular way of eating for first generation migrants, although cutlery (a spoon or fork) was generally used for rice and stew, the most common dish. The fact that eating with fingers was still preferred for typical Ghanaian dishes, especially those served with a soup, highlights the significance of the practice for the sense of ethnic identity. Despite having had to use cutlery at boarding school and fathers insisting on cutlery as a sign of sophistication in a few families in Ghana, in London the traditional way of eating was for most Ghanaians the key to a pleasurable experience of enjoying *fufu* and soup and other similar dishes.

Certain foods taste better with your fingers. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1639

#### 5.4. Summary and conclusions

Previous research shows that the home is the main arena for the performance of migrant or ethnic minority foodways in the new environment. Although food habits have generally been seen to be conservative in nature, various external and internal pressures contribute to their gradual modification. The process and level of acculturation is affected by various factors, such as age, gender, SES, length of stay in the host country, and household size and composition.

This chapter has addressed the research questions through a gendered analysis of the ways in which foodways together with ethnic identities are maintained, transformed, and renewed at the household level. With regard to the eating system, the focus was on the meal format, meal pattern and meal cycle, as well as food preparation rules and the social organisation of eating.

The first section of the chapter focused on the creation of Ghanaian meals in the early years when the availability of typical Ghanaian ingredients was poor. One of the main findings was the importance of substitute staples in the preservation of the traditional meal format. The actual substitutes and the ways in which they were prepared differed from the original ingredients but the resulting staples were close enough to the real ones, especially regarding consistency and heaviness, symbolising Ghanaian food. They could be eaten in a similar fashion to staples at home, providing migrants assurance and comfort in the new environment, and sustaining their ethnic identities, not only their more general Ghanaian or African identities, but also their tribal identities. A further interesting finding was that, as the availability of original Ghanaian produce improved, substitute staples were not necessarily dropped but represented new acceptable items of Ghanaian food culture. The same can be said of many of the new ingredients for sauces, the most significant being the preference for cheaper cuts of meat by many Ghanaians. A further finding was that substitutes created different standards of cooking and a means of distinguishing expatriates from local people when they visited Ghana.

As regards the changes and variation in the content, structure and patterning of eating in Ghanaian households, in most cases the only typical Ghanaian meal of the day was the main evening meal. Breakfast was either skipped or consisted of a hot beverage, while lunch was mostly European style, a minor meal. Despite smaller morning and midday meals in comparison to Ghana, snacking wasn't customary among first generation migrants in London, although young British Ghanaians had acquired a taste for snacks. A significant finding regarding the meal cycle was that weekends involved not only the preparation of traditional Ghanaian dishes but in several instances also the archetypical English meal (roast dinner with dessert) highlighting not only the effortless inclusion of old and

'new' food traditions but also the hybrid ethnic identities of many Ghanaians. The fact that some families produced a typical English Christmas dinner carried further substantial symbolic value in regard to the creolised nature of Ghanaian ethnic identities.

Although ethnic or tribal differences in the preference for certain staples were still apparent in London, there was evidence of border crossing and the amalgamation of habits among Ghanaians of different ethnic backgrounds – partly due to the convenience of some (substitute) staples and partly due to the increased variety of other foods. A further significant finding was that, although heaviness and familiarity were still favoured qualities of the main evening meals in London, some – especially women and the younger generation – preferred lighter options. Women were also more disposed to new tastes in the form of 'European' food. Families with young children, those which had spent longer time in the UK, those with higher educational levels, as well as single-parent families were all associated with increased consumption of non-Ghanaian (i.e. European and other ethnic) foods. It was difficult to point out to other SES differences in eating habits. As already addressed previously, financial commitments back in Ghana, and the preference for other external status symbols (e.g. cars, attires, hairstyle), meant that many Ghanaians in London were careful as far as spending money on everyday food was concerned. As the previous chapter depicted, instead of the home, social gatherings and large functions were the main showground for wealth and status in regard to food.

More detailed investigation into the consumption habits of young British Ghanaians revealed a three-phase cycle in regard to shifting identities and food preferences: young children ate Ghanaian food happily until they went to school when they started preferring more 'English' food. Later on in their teens they favoured again Ghanaian food. Since many children did not speak their parents'

native language(s), Ghanaian food remained for many the principal means of imagining their Ghanaian - not tribal - identity. However, if they had to prepare meals for themselves, they ended up combining the main cultures they were exposed to, resulting in hybrid food or meals, retaining the Ghanaian facet of the meal primarily through the meal format and the use of spices. A further finding was the practice in some families of sending young children back to Ghana to live with kin for a few years hence enhancing their liking for Ghanaian food. Another was that young British Ghanaians appeared to be willing to identify with other black African and Caribbean cultures in London and found these cuisines appealing. Hence, there was a clear shift away from their parents' tribal and Ghanaian identities to more general black British identities.

The investigation of the social context of main evening meals revealed that migration did not seem to alter the social organisation of eating within households a great deal. A significant finding was that family meals, as understood in the Western context, were not important for most Ghanaians in present day London or in (urban) Ghana in the past. Instead the main emphasis was on making sure that everyone had a meal, with or without company. In London, households were sites of multiple consumption practices, whereas in Ghana most household members ate the same food. Although in the past eating arrangements were a clearer indicator of social status than the food provided, migration seemed to iron out differences between households. Eating with fingers remained for first generation migrants the proper way of eating typically Ghanaian food, a source of further satisfaction and a way of reinforcing their ethnic identities.

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the development of Ghanaian foodways in the private sphere. Considering the *transformation* of habits, most of the changes in the meal pattern and the contents of meals were predictable, as similar changes have been shown in other migrant groups. Age and gender were



factors most connected with (transformed or different) food habits, which correlates with findings of other research on food and eating whether conducted among migrants or the wider population (Kjaernes, 2001a). Findings related to the meal cycle were of interest as they pointed out dissimilarities in regard to other migrants, who have been found to adhere to their own cultural food at weekends and during festive times (Charon Cardona, 2004). The hybrid identities of Ghanaians and familiarity with English food partly explain the phenomenon. Bush et al. found that the traditional British meal was an alternative for some *second* generation Italians when entertaining relatives, yet not for their parents' generation (Bush et al., 1998).

With regard to second generation Ghanaians, the shifting nature of their food habits and identities, and their influence on the food habits of the rest of the family, is similar to other migrant offspring (Harbottle, 1998; Harbottle, 2000; Valentine, 1999). The dislike of heavy food in particular by female British Ghanaians is similar to that of young second generation African-Caribbeans studied by Caplan et al. Their informants found West Indian food "heavy and starchy" because much of it is fried and salty" (Caplan et al., 1998: 180). Some young African-Caribbean women avoided it because of fears of putting on weight; others because it took a long time to prepare. Furthermore, some indicated that they had declined West Indian food as children and teenagers, but had begun eating it again in their twenties.

There is less information available in the literature on the use of substitutes, which enable the *maintenance* of food habits or meals, despite the change in nutritional content of the food. The detailed account on the process of substitution shows, among other things, that it is possible to compose a culture-specific dish even if the appropriate staple is not available, which contradicts Koctürk's (1995) view on the topic. The findings complement or supplement Calvo's (1982) writing

on the subject. Apart from the issues mentioned above on substitute staples becoming *additional* acceptable items of a food culture (i.e. not a replacement) and a means of differentiation from local people in the country of origin, the findings show how substitutes can be affected by neophobia (Fischler, 1980), just like any other new ingredients, and how they can be dropped when better, or more convenient, alternatives come along. Furthermore, substitutes (especially staples) can be made up not only of one or two ingredients, but of several, including condiments such as vinegar, to give the final outcome a better taste.

Looking at the Ghanaian evening meal in London further, considering that in most instances it retained the basic meal format of one main course consisting of either two or three items, puts emphasis on the stability of the structural aspects of meals. Hence, meals consumed by Ghanaians in London resembled very much the original (southern) 'Ghanaian' meal and also basic meals in many other African societies, many of which are based on a two-part structure (Fortes & Fortes, 1936; Richards, 1964; Ross et al., 1996; Spittler, 1993). One could say that because the structure of the Ghanaian meal is relatively simple, it cannot change much. If it does, it becomes more complex, with the inclusion of dessert on some occasions and the modification of a two part meal (e.g. rice and stew) to a three part meal (additional vegetables). In comparison, the usual three course main meal of South Americans became a two course meal in Sweden, because the soup served as a starter was dropped out (Borda, 1987). In other cultural contexts too, there are examples of meal structures becoming less complex in new surroundings or over time (Kjaernes, 2001a; Rotenberg, 1981).

With regard to *renewal* of habits, the findings of this and the previous chapter show the impact of the improved availability of typical Ghanaian foodstuffs on food habits of Ghanaians. Few studies in the past have looked into the development of food habits of migrants and their descendants in a historical

context. Although poor access to familiar ingredients over a long period of time has created consumers with different demands, standards and preferences as compared to recent migrants, there are Ghanaians in London who have made a full circle as regards eating is concerned. After preparing and eating a more European style of food for years, the better access to original Ghanaian or African ingredients has enabled them to begin eating more authentic Ghanaian, even regional or tribal, food again with nostalgic associations. On the other hand, this renewal of habits among older migrants can be seen as limited due to the adaptation process and preference for substitutes.

Finally, as regards *ethnic identity and foodways*, despite apparent unity at social functions, food consumption habits of Ghanaians in the private sphere are as diverse and mixed as the diasporic community itself. However, considering the informants I came across in this study, it was possible to delineate three broad groups of Ghanaians in London: firstly, those who still have a strong Ghanaian (even tribal) identity who do their uttermost to obtain authentic Ghanaian (African) ingredients; secondly, those who have a clear 'British' identity too and incorporate typically English food on a regular occasion in their weekly diet (weekends) and (or only) at Christmas; and third, those who accept pluralism and hybridity in an even broader fashion, and mix and match ingredients and dishes from different European and more distant food cultures. People belonging to the latter group are mainly, but not solely, second generation Ghanaians. Although I did not meet many people who fitted the first category, I believe their numbers are much greater in the wider community considering the large number of recent migrants.

Naturally, the boundaries of these groups are not rigid and there is a lot of overlapping and shifts in ethnic identities. Having a tribal identity does not rule out a British, or hybrid, identity. Ethnic groups, like food habits, are "processual and performative rather than fixed" (Bell & Valentine, 1997: 116) or, as Werbner puts

it, “rather than ‘being’ are continuously ‘becoming’.” (1990: 2) The words of Fischler fit here as well: “Food makes the eater: it is therefore natural that the eater should try to make himself by eating.” (1988: 282)

Throughout this chapter it has been clear that women undertake much of the preparation of the food and that there is a gendered pattern of consumption. This will be further analysed in the next chapter.

## 6. GENDERED SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF COOKING IN GHANAIAN HOUSEHOLDS

In most societies women are responsible for everyday cooking within the home. Yet there is evidence that migration may alter traditional gender roles, although this is not inevitable. In some cultural contexts, migrant women gain status and self-respect through their food-work. Attitudes and practices in regard to cooking may, however, differ among first and second generation migrants. In many societies, food exchange or gifts give women a culturally sanctioned capacity to obtain influence through commanding reciprocal commitments.

The focus of this chapter is on the gendered social organisation of food preparation in the Ghanaian context. It provides a comparative analysis of the situation in present-day London and the past in Ghana. It addresses primarily the first and third research questions on how foodways are maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants at the household level by focusing mainly on *who* does the cooking. It deals with other aspects related to the organisation of food preparation too, as defined by the eating system framework, such as the timing and routine of cooking. The analysis is placed within a wider discourse on the social significance of the social organisation of cooking.

I will start by analysing the gendered division of labour with regard to cooking in the Ghanaian context. Next I will look in more detail how issues related to meal preparation influence the types of food consumed. Finally, I focus on food exchange between households.

Regarding past practices in Ghana, the study relies mainly on the memories of first generation migrants but also on some secondary sources of information (e.g. Clark, 1994). Noticeably, since a number of informants in this study were relatively young when they left Ghana, they hadn't necessarily been responsible

for cooking at the time, although they may have helped with the task. This was especially the case for female informants.

The research showed, among other things, a continuation of gendered division of labour for first generation migrants as far as cooking is concerned, but modified gendered division of labour in the second generation. A significant difference in London as compared to Ghana was the level of assistance received from other household members in food preparation, with women in Ghana receiving considerable amounts of help from maids and children, especially daughters.

## **6.1. Gendered division of labour**

### **6.1.1. Women's work**

Considering food-work within Ghanaian homes in London, women were responsible for preparing and cooking the food, just like their mothers in Ghana in the past. This was to be expected as food preparation and cooking is regarded as part of a woman's duty towards her husband and an essential part of female identity, not only in Ghana (Dei, 1989) but throughout (West) Africa (Okere, 1983; Richards, 1939) and other parts of the world (Borda, 1987; Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Sidenvall et al., 2001).

Anything to do with nurturing and nourishing is a woman's job, basically. ... The man is to fend for the family, end of story. A woman cooks and takes care of the children. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 46

The situation is comparable to that of women in Western societies, who are still the primary actors in the home food arena and with other housework, even if they work full-time (Fürst, 1997; Murcott, 1983). The older generation especially have experienced cooking as a duty (Sidenvall et al., 2000). Yet, Fürst criticizes sociologists who view women's traditional behaviour as merely an expression of female subjugation in a patriarchal society and fail to address the question of

identity and the subjective experience of desire (Fürst, 1997: 443). According to Fürst, cooking carries positive potentials that are closely connected to feminine identity and rationality. The giving of food is intimately related to the subjective experience of being a woman. The homemade dinner, cooked by the woman for her man and children, is an exemplary gift. Professional food – generally prepared by men and served in cafeterias and restaurants in Western cultures – is on the other hand a commodity, as it is made outside the home, in the public sphere and sold to strangers for money. Cooking as the expression of the ‘rationality of the gift’, as opposed to the ‘rationality of the commodity’, appeals to generosity and can be seen as a production of use-values in the home (Fürst, 1997).

In view of the situation in Ghana, cooking appears to suggest marital obligations, as it is synonymous with marriage in the Akan society:

The defining element that distinguishes marriage from a more casual heterosexual relationship is the exchange of a regular cash allowance for food (called *akroma* or chop money), on the male side, and cooking the evening meal (implying sex), on the female side. (Clark, 1994: 344; see also Abu, 1983)

The symbolic relationship between food and sex is inferred in the Akan verb stem *dí* which stands for both eating and sexual relations (Abu, 1983). In a traditional polygynous marriage, cooking and sleeping arrangements rotate together. The sexual connotation is so strong that cooking is used to convey either positive or negative sexual feelings. If a wife is satisfied with the relationship she has with her husband, she will prepare “prompt, attractive, large meals” for him, taking extra care in cooking (Clark, 1994: 346).

Due to the intricate nature of cooking, a loving couple will never or scarcely ever go to a restaurant. They will eat the food prepared by the wife. If a married couple in Ghana go to a restaurant, people will ask the husband if his wife can cook or not. If a wife can’t cook or doesn’t learn to cook her marriage will suffer.

It's a disgrace if a woman goes, you know to get married and the husband complains that she cannot cook. It's a disgrace to the family because they haven't done their duty. When your daughter is ripe for marriage they should be ripe in everything. They should be able to keep the house, look after a child, cook food, because you know to get, to be loved by your husband you have to be a good cook [laughs]. You have to be a good cook. So our parents are very keen on making us sort of well, what's the word for it? What do the royals say? They're not acceptable, oh I've forgotten the word for it. You know Charles Dickens era. You know. *Accomplished* you know. You have to be *accomplished* to be married. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 133

However, as the sexual and financial pressures associated with cooking are focused only on the evening meal, married women are able to compromise ideal standards for the morning and midday meals (Clark, 1994). As observed by Clark, residents in Kumasi regularly bought these meals from cooked food vendors. This was actually taken for granted and had “no moral or relational repercussions.” (1994: 356) Even women, who did not leave the house for the day, bought food from nearby vendors rather than preparing something themselves. Correspondingly, a large number of informants in my study indicated that while they still lived in Ghana, they purchased cooked food from street vendors for lunch, and also for breakfast.

Clark (1994: 355) also points out that when the husband was away and not expected for the evening meal, the wife often gave up the preparation of the laborious evening meal of *fufu* and soup. A woman said she never cooked when her husband travelled out of town; instead she purchased rice or other cooked food from nearby vendors for herself and the children. Similar findings have been reported in other cultural contexts. For example, Murcott (1983) noticed in Wales that if husbands and children were absent, then women did not ‘cook’, some even skipped a meal. Noticeably, the presence of children was enough to encourage women to cook, whereas in the above example in Ghana, this was not the case. In Sweden too, widows did not enjoy cooking for themselves, and sometimes left out meals when they did not feel like eating or cooking (Sidenvall et al., 2000).



The husband's absence had a comparable impact on the cooking habits of Ghanaian women in London. For example, John was in Ghana at the time I interviewed Caroline:

Caroline: Their dad is not here so I don't bother cooking for myself, I just cook what they [children] want to eat and I just eat some myself.

HT: So how is the situation different when your husband is around?

Caroline: Then I cook with *pepper* in it! with pepper in it or typical Ghana foods that he likes, you know if he likes kenkey I will make kenkey, fry fish and put gravy on it ... they [the children] won't touch it [laughs], they hate those things. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 376

Similarly, when Grace (hhE) and her former husband had still been together, she had prepared *fufu* for him every single day. She had eaten it then as well, but now had it once a fortnight. Evelyn indicated that her cooking and eating habits had changed too since becoming a widow:

Evelyn: My husband was the homely type. He was very fussy with his food. He liked the *real* Ghanaian things so that's why I used to [buy them, e.g. dried fish and snails] but since he died, I don't because I can do without it. The kids are not bothered. I'm not bothered so yeah. ...

HT: What were your husband's favourite dishes then?

Evelyn: He liked fufu. Noone eats fufu here. My kids don't eat it. I don't eat it. He ate it so I was cooking soup almost every day, cooking soup yeah. He liked fufu a lot. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 651-75

Evelyn now prepared food according to her children's wishes, steering clear of ingredients and foodstuffs that her children disliked, to the extent of going without them even if she liked them herself.

Yeah, I like basmati but my daughter, the oldest one, she doesn't like the smell of basmati so we don't buy it. ... It's nice. I like it. Everyone does but I hate buying different things, cooking different things for myself and the family, you know, so we just have to stick to the long grain. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 952-60

For mainly practical reasons, Evelyn was willing to compromise for her daughter's sake to reproduce a unified pattern of consumption at home.

Children were clearly the main motive for cooking proper meals in the evening in single parent households. Grace (hhE) cooked a hot Ghanaian meal in the evening *because* of her daughter, indicating that if she lived on her own she

might not even bother, which is what women in other cultural contexts have also stated (DeVault, 1991; Mäkelä, 1996).

I've been working in canteens, so I mean I will eat at work and I'll come home and if it wasn't for my daughter I wouldn't even cook. But because she's young I cook for her, and have a little bit of whatever. Grace (hhE, Ashanti, 55+, 1965) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 154

Children's likes and dislikes were evidently taken into consideration.

Oh they probably think that Mum has just cooked this and I'm eating it. What they don't know is that the thought behind is more geared towards what they want. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 9

Yet in some households even children weren't always a big enough reason to cook. Pauline (hhH) who – unlike most other informants – had a late lunch after returning from work and no big dinner, occasionally sent her daughter to buy chicken and chips over the road, if she hadn't prepared an evening meal for her.

### 6.1.2. Ghanaian men cooking

Despite the strong sexual connotation of cooking, in some two-parent families, men cooked too, especially in London, although Gloria remembered her father taking over occasionally in Ghana as well:

Mostly on Saturdays when he finishes work on time and he says 'Oh I've got something I think I'm going to the kitchen myself today.' ... Mum hated that because it's a whole pot of meat, we just eat. You cook it - either fry it or roast it or whatever, steam it, with nothing else. We all sit down in a corridor and we had a big house anyway, so we all sit on the floor with him and everybody dipping in and would eat it. And she goes *mad! Goes mad! 'You're wasting food! It could have, you know, gone for two or three days!'* All gone. He says 'it's my money, I bought it, let them eat it' [laughs]. You know. Yes it was fun, it was fun. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 218

In the same way to this father, men who cooked in London did so very irregularly and it was generally something out of the ordinary, or a minor meal. They seldom cooked the regular evening meal. And in most instances they were well-educated, like Gloria's father in Ghana. In this respect, Ghanaian men were just like other well educated men, who have been found to undertake cooking in two-parent households (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Ekström & Fürst, 2001; Murcott, 1983).

For example, among Latin American refugees in Sweden, men took an interest in cooking special Latin American food at weekends for family and friends, yet not regularly or the normal weekday food (Borda, 1987).

A change in attitudes and crossing of boundaries in the realm of housework was evident in households studied by Oppong in Ghana as well. She found that up to 40 percent of the senior civil servants in her study (n=61) occasionally cooked food, only a few undertook it often or always (Oppong, 1974: 109).

It appeared that some men regarded their skills as a special bonus:

There are some Ghanaian men who take pride in the fact that they can cook. Because Ghanaian men don't like cooking because that's what women do. So when you have people who can cook they take great pride in it. And they would want to show off that you know I'm male and I can cook. So I can do better than *you* so to say [laughs]. ... Because they've got that instinct that you know I've got one up on you. You know. I'm a man and I can cook as well. You're a woman [laughs] and you can *cook* and that's it! [laughs] Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 317

John fitted Serwa's description well as he actually enjoyed cooking, even if he specialised in non-Ghanaian dishes<sup>131</sup>.

It's non-Ghanaian usually it'll be something like an Indian dish I cook also very well or any of the Asian dishes which I can cook most of them very well. ... Maybe because I'm not doing most of the cooking these days I tend to prepare non-Ghanaian dishes because she can cook Ghanaian dishes more so than the Asian dishes. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 503-11

By cooking foreign dishes he was displaying his cultured background and the fact that he was quite a connoisseur. Yet, as John was one of the few men in my study who had been taught to cook as a boy in Ghana, he knew how to prepare Ghanaian food too.

Caroline: So then he does cook, he's a good cook, a really good one. He can make soups he can make all the food I can make.

HT: Does he then cook frequently or not, if he's around?

Caroline: No no, when I'm around I'm home, so by the time he comes home from work, the man is hungry, so he has to eat. But at the weekends ... sometimes occasionally he's offering to cook so I say go in there. Make us something for a change. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 540-57

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<sup>131</sup> John (hhJ) had learnt to cook Indian dishes from a former girl friend of his who was from India.

Many men had been confronted with cooking for the first time when they migrated to the UK, as unmarried students. When they eventually got married they taught their newly arrived wives how to use the substitutes, which they were already acquainted with<sup>132</sup>.

You started cooking and then he realised I didn't actually know the pattern of European way of cooking compared to back home where things were done differently. So he used to teach me quite a few things really. Like the fufu. I *hardly* could ever do it and do it right. ... He did the soup first time to *show* me and then my aunty helped me as well with the cooking. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 915-19

Some Ghanaian men had found it acceptable to prepare English or Western dishes for themselves, not necessarily the quintessential Ghanaian cooked dinner.

He was eating westernized food because there was no woman to cook it [i.e. Ghanaian food]. Because he didn't have access to it. ... So I was cooking more Ghanaian food and I suppose he didn't complain. ... Occasionally he would come up with all this minted lamb and all this ... things I hadn't even heard about before. I'll probably get the lamb and then he would do it to just to show me. It was also more something he was used to. And especially when you live here. A typical Ghanaian man probably never cooked or you know rather eating from outside. The diet will be more Western British than Ghanaian. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 133

Although men had helped their wives in the beginning, everyday meal preparation was now firmly in the hands of women. Cooking was women's responsibility to the extent that some cooked in advance before going away on holiday (without their husband):

If I'm going on holiday I have to cook, even at times including boiling rice and put it in the freezer. ... Fried fish. Everything, put it in the freezer so he warms it when he wants. Back home 'cos they work and bring in the money and make sure there's food on the table. They have the same mentality but they don't realise that here also the woman works. So some chores should be shared. It doesn't click in the sense or if you keep demanding for that then that means you are being troublesome. So we just ignore it at times. Carol (hhO, Akuapim, 40+, 1989) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1342-6

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<sup>132</sup> Henry (hhB), John (hhJ), Gloria's (hhP) husband and Gladys' (hhN) former husband had all lived in the country much longer than their wives.

### 6.1.3. Maids and daughters

What was significant about the situation in London, as well as in Ghana in the past, was the fact that the majority of women – even if they had very small children – worked to earn a living, generally outside the home, although in Ghana some worked from home (e.g. cooking food to sell outside)<sup>133</sup>. As is common in other parts of West Africa, female employment in Ghana has been very high for married women, even though the fertility rate has been high (Peil, 1975). The position of Ghanaian mothers, therefore, was different to that of women in the UK in general, who have normally stayed at home with very young children, or returned to work part-time after a period at home (Reynolds, 2001). This includes some other first generation migrant women in the UK (e.g. South Asian Muslim women) who usually remain at home altogether for various reasons, especially after having children (Bush et al., 1998; Saifullah Khan, 1977; Williams et al., 1998). However, the position of Ghanaian women in London appears to be similar to that of other black women who have been shown to engage in higher rates of full-time employment than white women<sup>134</sup> (Reynolds, 2001).

Ghanaian migrant women were, therefore, used to the notion of 'double burden', i.e. working outside the home, as well as being in charge of childcare and cooking. The way in which the situation in London differed from Ghana was that they lacked the help of other household members. Although the majority of informants had lived in nuclear families already in the past (see Oppong, 1974), with only a few living in larger compound houses with extended family members, even nuclear families were large, including possibly half-sisters and brothers,

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<sup>133</sup> Not all female informants in London were working at the time of the study, but most had done so in the past, especially when their children were small.

<sup>134</sup> Reynolds reports recent statistics of employment for black females, 77% working at a minimum 35 hours per week, while the corresponding figure for white women is 56% (Reynolds, 2001). She also points out that while for white women the number of women in full-time employment has more than doubled in rate over the last 30 years, the working hours for black women have remained largely unchanged from the late 1970s.

cousins, as well as domestic helpers, who were mostly girls. In effect, most middle or upper class households (or the 'educated elite') had 'housemaids' to help with household chores, including cooking, despite the very important and delicate nature of the latter task.

Clark (1994) noticed that in Kumasi, married women living with their husbands had no help from adult kin, unlike unmarried women who were more likely to have relatives cooking for them. As it was difficult to invite kin to live with them in the husband's home, married women relied more on maids. In order to minimize sexual competition, many hired girls as young as seven years old (Clark, 1994: 354). Girls were generally recruited from rural areas (Goody, 1975)<sup>135</sup>.

The employment of a maid was a direct consequence of mothers working outside the home, and not being able to return home early enough to cook the main meal of the day which was in effect a lengthy process.

Like my mother was able to you know have a maid, well maids in the house, because of the job she did she couldn't do the cooking ... Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 367

Oppong too found that the wives of civil servants in Accra let maids undertake most of the work:

Those who say that they do their own cooking are often observed to be merely supervising the young girls in their households, who are actually doing the work. (Oppong, 1974: 108)

Female household heads taught the maids the way they wanted the food cooked, and if they could not supervise the cooking from beginning to end, they came home to complete the final stages of cooking or at least tasted the food before it

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<sup>135</sup> Goody writes: "The modern housemaid may be a relative of her master or mistress. This is preferred and common. However, many appear to be unrelated, and to come for a sum of a few pounds paid monthly or annually, to the parents of a young girl, or when she is older, to the girl herself. Such girls tend to stay only a few years, and then either marry, or move to some form of more remunerative employment .... There is a definite pattern of recruiting girls in rural areas to work as 'housemaids' in the cities of Ghana." (Goody, 1975: 144)

was served to check whether it was up to their standards, which symbolised ownership.

My mother worked on weekdays so although there were people who did the cooking my mother was always keen, she wants to be there to see the cooking how it's been done. John (hhJ, Fanti, 55+, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 367

Clark observed this practice among Kumasi traders:

Most women returned from the market in time to complete the final pounding [of fufu], which involves judgement about portion sizes for each family member as well as their preferred texture. (Clark, 1994: 351-2)

Before and after school, as well at weekends, and in less wealthy families, older daughters helped with cooking, younger ones doing other chores.

... even though there's a maid or somebody doing, sometimes the maid will be tired or your Mum won't be there, and the maid will make sure that [laughs] you help her. So sometimes it'll be one of the girl's turn to be helping the maid or looking at what the maid is doing ... Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 460

HT: So you were actually also cooking.

Gloria: Yes. Cooking on weekends. Oh you *have* to. The weekends cooking and weekends cleaning. The maid is off. So we do it. Whether you like it or not. You have to. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 226-34

And then I think we used to leave school about four. Then you come home and you help with the cooking. It's almost always fufu. We always have maid servants in the house and they'll start the cooking, but at one point, as a girl, you are expected to, you have your defined role. Actually at one time my job is to scrub the (big pot) after the fufu has been pounded. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 231 and 233

Since less wealthy households in Ghana could not afford the expense of a full-time domestic worker, the help of children was undoubtedly more important.

Girls in Ghana learnt to cook from an early age<sup>136</sup> through observation and practice as written recipes were not used. Clark describes how the delegation of cooking to young children was made easier by the restricted set of acceptable dishes favoured by Ashantis:

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<sup>136</sup> One of the male informants explained how his mother taught him to cook as well.

A young girl can master all the acceptable dishes within a year or two of acquiring the needed dexterity and strength. The lack of variation or discretion also facilitates turning specific tasks over to children. Girls begin grinding vegetables for the family soup at age six or eight. The ability to judge cooking times and ingredient quantities develops by age ten or twelve. Pounding fufu requires more strength and coordination, turning the lump in rhythm between each stroke of the pestle and reaching each family member's preferred soft or hard consistency. A girl is ready to take charge of the entire process by age twelve or fifteen, depending on her aptitude and interest. Further experience adds little to quality, which depends more on conscientiousness than additional skill. (Clark, 1994: 351)

In London, however, none of the households had housemaids and even the help of children was problematic, this being the case in both two-parent and single parent households. None of the younger children (under 10) helped out, and the older ones appeared to prepare food mainly for themselves (e.g. breakfast or some minor meal), not for other family members to share. This was the case also in households in which mothers had made the effort to teach their children to cook. For example, Angela (hhB, 19) was able to cook for the whole family and had done so occasionally on Sundays, but not in the very recent past.

Yeah I cook everything, I cook rice, kenkey, stew, like oxtail, chicken, goat ehm cornbeef, potatoes, lasagne, spaghetti, jollof, anything really. Angela (hhB, 19)  
1st, pg 618

Different attitudes in regard to their daughters' upbringing in London were apparent. For example, Grace (hhE) was keen for her daughter to do well at school and did not want anything to disrupt her studies. In fact, the only food Nicole (hhE, 17) had ever prepared was spaghetti Bolognese which she had learnt at school in Food Technology. Cooking skills were no longer seen as essential for marriage.

Yet, what contributed to the poor cooking skills of children was that their mothers lacked time, or were too tired to teach them when they had time off from work.



OK Ella is 13. I don't think she can cook anything. She'll tell you she can cook beefburgers and hamburgers and all these things. Oh and she can make some noodles. And every time I tell myself it's holiday times I'm going to teach this girl to cook, but I never get around to it. I do it because I find it quicker, it's easier to do it. I mean I come back from work or from college, you have just one hour to prepare the dinner. I can't sit there and watch Ella take her time, slice onions and take two hours to cook one stew. Or even at weekends to drive her down to the kitchen. When I was fourteen I could do more than they can do now. Gladys (hhN, Ashanti/Krobo, 48, 1984) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 149

Whether children learnt to cook and actually helped out in the household depended a lot on their parents' attitude and authority, a difference possibly occurring between single and two-parent households.

I mean I've got two girls but I've always I mean I remember I used to tell my wife, I don't want these kids to go out of this house not being able to cook and it's been instilled in them and obviously you know it shows on them now, especially the big one now has got this boyfriend and he's literally living in our kitchen now and he eats there all the time because the girl can cook, you know. I don't blame it on the kids who have been born here. I mean they are out most of the time and you can't really sort of pin them down all the time. James (Fanti, 50+, 1970) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 1633

Children's own attitudes and behaviour had a part to play too<sup>137</sup>.

I can cook but it's just I'm too lazy to cook it, I refuse to do it. Usually we had to cook, we had to take it in turns on a Sunday to prepare something for the whole family to eat. Frances (hhB, 16) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 564

Serwa gave the impression that she had actually taught her daughter to cook, who nevertheless did not want to spend the time required to prepare it.

But she's not doing it in the way I taught her because she hasn't got time to be in the kitchen. You know. She'd rather just do something quickly and this day and age children don't *like* to be in the kitchen for a long time. Whilst there's fast food why bother to be in the kitchen. Like my daughter she doesn't *like* to .. she doesn't like the look of raw fish or let alone *handle* it. I *try* to *make* her handle it. She doesn't like handling it. When it's cooked ready in the fridge *she loves it!* Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 137

Not wanting to spend the time required for the preparation of traditional dishes was also characteristic of adolescent South Asian girls studied by Sheikh and Thomas (1994).

Consequently, a number of young Ghanaian second generation women did not know how to cook many of the Ghanaian dishes.

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<sup>137</sup> Children's behaviour was seen as problematic in London. It was one of the major concerns of Ghanaian parents in London.

Molly: I think we can cook if we put our mind to it we can actually produce what we want to produce, but

Penelope: But we just don't like cooking and it's really bad, but I know - put it this way I know if I was in a situation whereby there was no one to cook for me at all, I would definitely cook. Yeah I would definitely. But I've still yet to learn all the you know basic well like peanut butter soup I don't know how to make it.

Molly: I (don't) know how to make jollof rice, I know how to make it separate, to cook the rice and to cook the stew but when it comes to making them together it goes all wrong. Molly (hhl, 23, 1983) & Penelope (hhl, 22, 1983) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 677-81

Although the preparation method of *fufu* in the two countries differed considerably, being much easier in Britain, young British Ghanaians seemed to dislike its preparation as much as some of their counterparts in Ghana.

Sometimes I do .. I do like to eat African foods but I can't cook it as good as my Mum can, I mean I can cook jollof rice, peas, things like that, but I can't cook fufu [laughs] because of my arm just tires when I'm when I'm trying to cook it. So I don't I don't really eat it for the simple fact that I can't do it. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 19

One can conclude that, similarly to the young British Iranian women studied by Harbottle (2000), second generation Ghanaian girls did not necessarily acquire cooking skills as had been the case for their mothers, and considered them less important for their identity and future.

## 6.2. Kitchen technology, convenience food and time

Although women shouldered the major part of cooking alone in London, they relied on the aid of kitchen technology to a much higher level in comparison to their mothers in Ghana. Apart from gas or electric stoves<sup>138</sup>, most households had a wide range of kitchen appliances, such as liquidizers, microwave ovens, and deep friers, as standard electrical devices<sup>139</sup>. Freezer or freezers – as some households had two – were also important for storing Ghanaian ingredients bought in bulk as well as food cooked over the weekend.

<sup>138</sup> Households in Ghana may have gas or electric stoves, but many favour charcoal pots because they enable cooking outside where it is cooler.

<sup>139</sup> Oppong (1974) notes that although a few of the civil servant's wives in Accra had electric mixers and grinders in their kitchens, much of the grinding and pounding of nuts and vegetables continued to be done with flat stones and wooden pestles and mortars.

A further help was the fact that – unlike in the past – a lot of the ingredients used for Ghanaian dishes were already partly processed substitutes. Lengthy chores generally undertaken by housemaids or other family members, such as finely grinding tomatoes and peppers or the preparation of palm fruit for the extraction of palm juice, were not required in London.

So when the palms [palm fruit] are ripe the houseboy will cut it and chop it up in small pieces and take them off the stock or whatever. Or we all join in and pulled them out. So boil it, pound it, take the nuts out and use it. Gloria (hhB, Fanti, 45+, 1978) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 697

Nevertheless, the advances in London did not totally replace the help of maids and other family members, and as a consequence dishes that required lengthy preparation were no longer made regularly, or only at weekends. In fact, in one of the two households in which mothers were not quite without help, some of the more cumbersome dishes were also served during the week. Carol's (hhO) mother clearly helped with the cooking and enabled the preparation of things like *banku* and *fufu* during the week<sup>140</sup>.

The 'double burden' Ghanaian women experienced in London was, in fact, one reason why some women expressed the wish to return to Ghana where they would benefit from the help of maids and other family members (Deborah, hhF; Miriam, hhD).

In actual fact, the situation of Ghanaian families in London resembled more of that of poorer households in Ghana as they did not have domestic servants, and lacked time for cooking proper meals, especially weekday evenings. Meals based on *kenkey* or rice were therefore popular. This food was often not made at home in Ghana. In fact, in Ghana poorer households without maids seemed to buy

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<sup>140</sup> In two other families (hhF and hhP), grandmothers had meant more work for the mother, as they had come over to look after the children and not to do the cooking. As their tastes were more conservative, mothers had to make extra effort in preparing Ghanaian meals for them.

*more* cooked food from street vendors (e.g. Robert, hhA; Grace, hhE; Abby, hhG), as this was not only convenient but also more economical<sup>141</sup>.

A notable difference however is that while in Ghana *kenkey* and fish appeared to be one of the most inexpensive dishes, in London it certainly wasn't. A ball of *kenkey* for one cost between 50 to 60 pence and, as Evelyn (hhl) put it, she could buy a bag of potatoes for that amount and it would feed the whole family. The convenience of *kenkey* outweighed any concerns of cost.

Unlike Ghana where you have time here you don't have the time. You get back from work and you're so tired. You don't want to go into the kitchen and cook. You just want to get something, heat it up and eat. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 8

Less time in London for food preparation was also linked with different, longer working hours and longer time needed for commuting than in Ghana, where many women were independent traders with flexible working hours, possibly working near the home.

Lack of time in London meant that many Ghanaians cooked sauces in bulk at the weekends, not every day like in Ghana (which was partly due to lack of refrigeration).

I do the food weekends, Saturdays, go shopping Friday evenings or Saturday mornings, then we take the day, do the cooking for the whole week, yeah then, we store it in the freezer, I divide everything like if I have to do fish stew, I divide it into two, put half in the freezer half in the fridge, then soup half in the freezer half in the fridge, like when we eat, like from Sunday Monday Tuesday, and when it finishes I take the one in the freezer night before then it falls for like Thursday Friday. Deborah (hhF, Fanti, 35+, 1988) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 155

Although the cooking of Ghanaian stews and soups generally took longer than the preparation of English/European dishes, most Ghanaians still preferred their own sauces. The fact that they could cook them in bulk and preserve a part of them for the week ahead saved them a lot of time during the week. Ghanaians

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<sup>141</sup> Current research carried out in Ghana shows that households with lower income purchase more prepared food away from home than those with higher income, one likely reason being that street foods were dividable so that even a small amount of money could buy something (Maxwell et al., 2000).

didn't think that English/European food could be treated in this manner. It was a convenience food, which did not last for more than the one meal (e.g. chicken and chips)<sup>142</sup>. This would mean having to prepare something again the next day, which many tried to avoid. On this basis, English/European food was more time consuming, and expensive, than Ghanaian food, especially if the latter did not contain any of the original Ghanaian ingredients.

This is contrary to the assumption that lack of time would result in eating more English/European food because of ease and quickness of preparation, as is the case in some ethnic minority groups<sup>143</sup> (Wyke & Landman, 1997). Ghanaian food in its simple form was seen by many to save both time and money.

### **6.3. Cooking for others – food exchange between households**

In London, despite the feeling that they lacked time, many Ghanaian women were still prepared to cook food not only for their own family, but also for their (male and female) friends and relatives. Like the Italian Americans studied by Theophano and Curtis, food exchange and reciprocity were particularly the domain of women (Theophano & Curtis, 1991). They were activities through which women established, maintained and expressed their social positions. All informants seemed to have either close and/or more distant relatives in London, some more so than others. Cooking for others happened especially if someone was unwell and living on his/her own, but also if the person was thought to be too busy to cook for him/herself, and sometimes simply out of the sheer pleasure of cooking.

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<sup>142</sup> This is what many other ethnic minority groups in the UK think of English food as well (see Wyke & Landman, 1997).

<sup>143</sup> For example, many South Asians make fresh bread, or roti, to go with the meal, which is more time consuming (Wyke & Landman, 1997).

Cooking for others was an old Ghanaian tradition, a common phenomenon in other cultural contexts too, symbolising and constituting social relationships and union (Richards, 1939; Theophano & Curtis, 1991). Nukunya notes that food sharing or food exchange is an essential feature of economic life throughout Ghana where ordinary catches of fish and game and regular harvests are frequently shared with friends, neighbours and relatives (Nukunya, 1992). Women cook not only for their husbands but often for other kinsfolk (Dei, 1991), reinforcing social ties and networks. For example, among the Gonja of northern Ghana,

a woman has responsibilities towards her parents, towards a brother whose wife has died or left him, to a sister who is ill, and to a woman who fostered her in childhood. If she is living in the same town with any of these people, she will feel obliged to send them a portion of the food she prepares for the large evening meal .... (Goody, 1973: 121)

A study carried out in Greater Accra revealed that frequent exchanges of cash or food between nuclear and extended families (i.e. gifts and remittances) made up an important source of income for some households (Maxwell et al., 2000). While cash was the most important type of transfer, food constituted nearly 30 percent of all transfers.

Due to interhousehold transfer of meals, or food exchange, many Ghanaian women in London experienced a respite from cooking when they were more seriously ill or unwell. For example, Evelyn's friends brought her cooked food as she was on sick leave recovering from an operation. There was a mutual understanding that Evelyn's grown-up daughters would not help properly.

Yeah my children are here. I mean they work, they come home late. Well, they okay they think 'oh these children were brought up here so they don't know the Ghanaian way of looking after (the ill)'. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 419

Evelyn also indicated that because Ghanaians lacked maids in London, they relied more on the help of their friends in times of need. Not everyone had close relatives they could depend on. Because migration had separated families, the

significance of Ghanaian friends and neighbours in London increased as far as food exchange was concerned.

The food Evelyn received was the same as she would prepare herself, i.e. Ghanaian style stews and soups, which were ready in containers that she could put in the freezer and take out when needed<sup>144</sup>. This underlines again how the knowledge of the variety and suitability of Ghanaian meals was shared, and how the majority of families had a similar repertoire of dishes. Hence, friends or relatives could be confident that the food they cooked would be appreciated, although sometimes the level of seasoning (i.e. chilli pepper) differed:

When my mum went to Ghana ehm a lot of Ghanaians brought over stews for me to eat, I had to eat them really slowly 'cos they were so hot [laughs]. Nicole (hhE, 17) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 475

Cooking for others was generally done spontaneously, without asking whether the other person was in need or not.

... then decided to go to Shepherds Bush on the off chance. Did some cooking on the Saturday to take ... to my uncle. So I went there. He wasn't expecting me. Dumped the food, drove back. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 942

The distance that some were prepared to travel to deliver food highlights the significance of, and the value placed on, the act of giving of food. For example, Caroline went all the way to southeast London from west London by public transport to visit a friend's husband who had not been well:

I even went to see the man on that Monday because the wife is gone home [i.e. to Ghana], and I said 'oh a man and two boys, making their own food, let me cook some food for him'. So I cook, put them in the basket and everything and set off all the way to Sydenham Dulwich. Caroline (hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 2079

Caroline's gesture meant that she could count on her friend's help to cook for her family if ever she or her husband found themselves in a similar situation. This

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<sup>144</sup> Notably, sauces rather than staples were given as the former were much more cumbersome to cook than the basic staples, rice, kenkey or yam.

was indeed the essence of all food exchanges and followed the principle of reciprocity (Mauss, 2001).

Between friends, transfers tend to carry the obligation to respond in the same way if the friend who helps out is later in need. (Maxwell et al., 2000: 47)

By cooking for others, women were indicating that they were “a responsible citizen as well as a good and reliable one who deserves assistance in time of need.” (Nukunya, 1992: 103) The return payment may not be immediate but it will eventually come, possibly in another form, such as help with funeral arrangements for a close relation. Nukunya points out that assistance can be relied on only when people or groups play their part in “the spirit of reciprocity” (1992: 103). As a matter of fact, not all women in the study indicated that they cooked for others than their immediate family members, or received food from friends or relatives. This was possibly dependant on the stage in the domestic life cycle, women with young children having less time and opportunity to engage in food exchange with all but their closest kin (see Theophano & Curtis, 1991). On the other hand, Serwa (hhM) had far more time: her husband had died when Emefa was quite young, so she did not have someone to cook for at home, as Emefa looked after herself. Serwa was very much like other widowed women who have been shown to dislike cooking for themselves and to skip meals (Sidenvall et al., 2000).

I love to cook for people to come and eat more than to cook for myself. [laughs] I find it so boring. That's why I don't do okro soup a lot. Because I don't enjoy it by myself. I like somebody to enjoy it with or even if it means cooking it .. sometimes I cook okro soup and then I take some to Elisabeth [hhQ]. I phone her from work, I say will you pass through. 'Oh what have you got for me then?' She comes and takes okro soup and then I phone somebody else, people I know that like it. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 280

Friends gave Serwa the opportunity to share the pleasure of cooking and gift-giving (Fürst, 1997). Apart from maintaining social networks, the special dishes she prepared also reinforced their Ghanaian and tribal identities. Serwa, who



often cooked for friends or relatives, received food from others as well, underlining the reciprocal nature of food transfers.

Like ehM Alice up the road, she'll cook because she thinks I'm such a busy person I shouldn't be cooking, so she will cook and bring the whole pot here [laughs]. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 2109

Serwa was actually one of the few people who mentioned cooking a lot of food in case an unforeseen visitor called round, which was a normal part of Ghanaian hospitality.

You cook it because you don't know who is going to call. You don't know how many Elisabeths [hhQ] there will be who will call at lunchtime and say I want to eat. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 325

She didn't hesitate to visit her friends out of the blue either:

Occasionally I just feel so lazy. And I ring around, 'Have you got any food, I'm *starving!*' And then I go and eat there. [laughs] So we do that a lot. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 329

Despite the general notion of hospitality, not everyone in London appeared to prepare food with visitors in mind. I got the impression that some Ghanaians had been discouraged already in childhood from eating in other people's homes, and had carried this attitude with them.

With me or with us, if the person is not very close, then I mean hardly will I even drink water. But I mean some people don't mind, but I'm a bit we're a bit choosy about where we eat. Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 99

Ghanaian customs seemed to be at odds here:

As a child you are told that your mother's food is the best. Don't go long nosing. On the other hand you are also told you never know the hungry guest who is coming, so always have to cook more than enough. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 122

Fantis in particular seemed to prefer eating at home, or not eating in other people's places, unless they were very close. In London, Ghanaians had also learnt to differentiate between visitors, Ghanaians getting the 'traditional' treatment and others the more restrained English customary ways.

For our tradition you expect the person to have a meal with you. You give the water, ask them the purpose [of the visit] and then probably you have a meal with them. Rather than have a chat over a cup of tea and biscuits or what we're doing now. It's not to an acceptable level in our tradition. Adwoa (Nzema, 40+) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 25

As a researcher into Ghanaian foodways, I was an ambiguous person in that some regarded me as one of them and offered food, whereas others kept a distance by only providing a drink.

Another form of food exchange and reciprocity that took place in the Ghanaian community was food preparation for large functions. Unless a professional Ghanaian catering service had been given the task, it was quite common for women to share the cooking. Hence, people had to find time at weekends to cook for the occasion. Pauline (hhH), Caroline (hhJ) and Carol (hhO) indicated that they were asked to prepare food quite regularly, but then Gladys (hhN) had only prepared something once. Friends were also asked to help out:

One thing with the Ghanaian community is ah when you have something [a gathering], everyone will cook something for you, you know. Everyone will be prepared to cook something for you so the burden isn't just you. Evelyn (hhl, Fanti, 46, 1983) 3<sup>rd</sup>, pg 592

Yakayeke and abolo, there's those Ewes diets, it's not everybo- I can't cook yakayeke, I can't cook abolo either, so if I need it I have to phone my friend in north London ... I phone B and say to her, 'right this occasion, can you make me, you know a hundred balls of yakayeke'. ... So I'll buy that from *here*, and then take it to Reading, and I *know* that there'll be about ninety percent of the people there wouldn't have had it for a long time [laughs]. So it's exciting. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 873-81

This last quote highlights again how closely the gendered task of cooking, and, more importantly, culinary *skills* were related to the reproduction and reinforcement of ethnic identities. It is apparent that not everyone shared the same level of skills or knowledge of cooking, but women were vital in maintaining and reinforcing ethnic identities.

#### **6.4. Summary and conclusions**

Previous research shows that in most societies women are responsible for the bulk of cooking within the home, although increasingly men contribute too, usually in the form of minor or special meals. In the context of migration, the gendered division of labour may alter or remain stable. There are not many studies that have analysed the social context of food preparation in detail within migrant communities, but there is evidence that in some cultural contexts migrant women derive considerable power and influence from their food-work.

This chapter compared the gendered organisation of food preparation in Ghanaian households in London with past practices in Ghana, and situated the analysis within a more general discourse on the social significance of cooking. The chapter provided further answers mainly to the first and last research questions.

One of the expected results was that Ghanaian women continued to be responsible for the bulk of meal preparation in Ghanaian households in London, as cooking was regarded as part of a woman's duty towards her husband and an essential part of female identity. In many ethnic groups in Ghana it is also a symbol of marriage, hence women took their husband's preferences carefully into consideration. Better educated men occasionally cooked something out of the ordinary at weekends, or for breakfast, which is common also in other cultural contexts.

Areas in which changes had occurred in the social organisation of food preparation were the level of help received from other household members, the use of kitchen technology, and the amount of time available for cooking. While maids helped considerably with cooking-related tasks in wealthier families in

Ghana, in London, the lack of help not only affected the timing but also the content of meals as well as cooking strategies (i.e. cooking in bulk at weekends). Modified attitudes meant that for many young British Ghanaians the acquisition and practice of cooking skills was no longer an essential part of being a woman. Among the first generation, reciprocal food exchange continued to be a source of pleasure for many Ghanaian women and a means of establishing, maintaining and expressing their social position. More systematic and in-depth research would be required to capture the extent and importance of food exchange for household food provisioning among the Ghanaian community in London.

Considering the gendered division of labour, cooking clearly carried for Ghanaian women in London, as in Ghana, symbolic and social meanings closely connected to their feminine identity and status. The giving of food was intimately related to the subjective experience of being a woman (see Fürst, 1997: 441). The fact that maids undertook a large part of food preparation in wealthier families in Ghana didn't seem to upset this relationship a great deal, as the delegation of cooking was still the woman's responsibility, and in many instances she was able to influence the final result and serving of food.

The sexual connotation of cooking explains why men were so reluctant to cook – or why women were so unwilling to allow men to cook – either in the home, or outside in the public sphere in London. Cooking was in essence a threat to a man's masculinity, as in some other cultures too. Regarding the affirmation of male identities, in many societies an avoidance of female-associated roles and activities, including cooking, is seen to be essential to the effective performance of masculinity (Fürst, 1991: 120).

The fact that some men occasionally undertook cooking in the home implies modified male (and female) identities, indeed hybrid identities, but this is not necessarily linked with migration as the practice occurred among well-educated

men in Ghana as well, where people of professional background aspire to the model of a Western middle-class family (Goody & Groothues, 1979; Oppong, 1974).

The delegation of cooking responsibilities to maids in Ghana had, in effect, enabled the preparation of the favourite arduous dishes (e.g. *fufu* or *banku* and soup) in time for the evening meal in wealthier households. This contradicts Bourdieu's (1984) notion that these kinds of 'casserole dishes' which require a big investment of time and interest are linked to a traditional conception of woman's role preserved in the *lower* social classes. In actual fact, people in lower social classes in Ghana went more frequently *without* dishes requiring lengthy cooking and bought cooked food from street vendors, some of which was regarded lighter than the traditional evening meals cooked at home. In London, however, it was possible to notice a shift in the preparation of favourite heavy dishes to the weekend, due to lack of time during the week. On the other hand, some were able to eat their favourite heavy meals during the week as well by 'strategic' cooking at the weekend. The timing of eating was nevertheless affected, as the meal wasn't ready when women returned home from work. Although most informants in the study worked reasonable hours, eating very late in the evenings was apparently very common in the wider Ghanaian community due to lengthy working hours (several jobs) and cooking late at night.

The fact that Ghanaian women in London shoulder the cooking and most other housework (see Goody & Groothues, 1979) is similar to the situation of Ghanaians elsewhere in the diaspora (Wong, 2000) and to that in many other migrant and ethnic minority groups (Harbottle, 2000; Ruud, 1998). The way in which the Ghanaians' position differs is that they have a true double-burden, because usually they work full-time outside the home. Goody's and Groothues study suggests that many Ghanaian women in London are working hard to be

financially independent in case of divorce (Goody & Groothues, 1979), which is now common in Ghana (Boateng, 1996). In a recent survey carried out there, 52 percent of households were headed by females (Boateng, 1996). I would like to add another reason why women in London should be on their guard: the early death of their partner from hypertension or related problems seems alarmingly widespread in the community.

As single mothers, Ghanaian women in London may have a smaller burden as far as cooking is concerned because they don't have to take their partner's preferences into consideration, which are usually geared more towards traditional food. On the other hand, there is evidence that single mothers are especially vulnerable to changing food habits among the younger generation because there is only one adult in the home to counter the rejection of traditional eating patterns by children (Palinkas & Pickwell, 1995: 1646). Moreover, as this research shows, single mothers may also find it more difficult to teach their children to cook, because they lack their partner's support and authority. As the findings indicate, some young British Ghanaians lack cooking skills as far as many typical Ghanaian dishes are concerned.

To conclude, Ghanaian women have a vital role in the maintenance of foodways and identities in the home and the community.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the relationships between migration, foodways, ethnic identities and gender through a case study of Ghanaians in London. The main research questions were:

1. How are foodways maintained, transformed, and renewed by migrants and their descendants at both household and community levels?
2. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and foodways amongst migrant groups?
3. What is the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities?

This chapter addresses the empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge of the thesis. The next section spells out the empirical contribution, and the theoretical contributions are discussed subsequently in relation to each of the research questions. The interrelated nature of the research questions is apparent in the ensuing discussion.

The limitations of the study are that it was small scale, and did not involve any other West Africans in London for comparative analysis. This is an area for further research. Furthermore, it included fewer male informants and less observation of cooking than originally planned. Also, although hypertension and obesity are clearly a problem in the Ghanaian community, the study did not focus on the nutritional intake or health implications of dietary habits, or other relevant lifestyle issues.

## 7.1. Empirical contribution

The thesis is an original empirical contribution to knowledge as it presents an in-depth analysis of the foodways of a formerly under-researched West African migrant and ethnic minority community in the UK. The micro-level analysis of food habits within households is set in a wider context by exploring the development of the food culture in the community as a whole. The thesis examines the ways in which ethnic identity, gender, and past practices, have shaped the development of Ghanaian food culture and the current food habits of Ghanaian households in London. Previously there has been very little research into the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on the food habits of migrants from former colonies. Due to the former colonial ties between Ghana and Britain, the thesis makes an empirical contribution through this case study. There has also been little known about African food businesses hitherto.

## 7.2. Theoretical contribution

### 7.2.1. Maintaining, transforming and renewing foodways

Addressing the first research question, this study makes a theoretical contribution to knowledge through a structural analysis of food and eating habits.

First of all, few studies in the past have made use of a structuralist approach to studying food and eating among first and second generation migrants<sup>145</sup>. A number of nutritionally and anthropologically oriented studies involving migrants have concentrated on food items, but here a structuralist approach was applied in order to understand the social processes of maintenance and change of food

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<sup>145</sup> The study by Goode et al. (1984a, 1984b) focused on *second* and *third* generation Italian Americans.



habits (e.g. related to the incorporation of new food items into the diet), and their role in expressing ethnic identities.

The eating system framework developed for the study is an amalgamation and extension of various previous conceptualisations of eating practices, mainly based on qualitative and theoretical research on Western meals and eating, but also influenced by research carried out on food habits in African societies. It clearly depicts the various areas of analysis, all related to structural and social issues of food and eating: the meal format, eating pattern, meal cycle, and social organisation of eating and food preparation. As a contribution to the analysis of meal structures, the thesis examines the important, but formerly little researched concept, of 'substitution' in detail.

Secondly, the thesis provides a *West African* (i.e. sub-Saharan) viewpoint to structural issues related to food and eating, albeit partially embedded in a Western context. Most previous information about African meals has been gathered by anthropologists through direct observation of habits of rural populations, while this research was based on memories of food and eating in their country of origin in mainly urban settings as well as current habits in the UK. Although the African point of view is not necessarily 'pure' but already affected by the colonial encounter – being a *hybrid* culture – it has become apparent that West Africans, or in this case Ghanaians, may have quite different understandings about proper meals (see de Garine, 1997; Spittler, 1993) and they don't necessarily share the same views or concerns about food and eating as their Western counterparts. The thesis contributes consequently to the ongoing discussion about the fate of 'proper meals' in modern society by providing a West African perspective. It widens understandings of what constitutes a 'proper' family meal showing that it does not have to include commensality or simultaneity.

*Processes of change and maintenance of food habits – the role of substitutes*

The thesis confirms that structural issues are crucial for a better understanding of continuity and change in food habits of migrants and their descendants. It underlines the importance of understanding group-shared rules in regard to meal formats and the classification, preparation and combination of foodstuffs when assessing the dietary modification of migrants. As Ilmonen states, “deeply rooted models of thought do not change, even though the surface of society is rapidly restructured.” (Ilmonen, 1991: 181) The sole consideration of food items and food item frequencies is likely to provide a false impression of the modification of food habits.

Through the examination of substitutes, the thesis shows how structural and sensory properties of a food can be more important for the preservation of the identity of a dish than the actual foodstuff itself, even the original taste. The main carbohydrate-rich staple of a dish can be replaced with another without changing the cultural affiliation of the meal, if the new staple shares similar cultural characteristics (*fait culturel*) (Calvo, 1982: 418) to the one it replaces. The consistency, colour and mouth-feel of the food, for example, are important characteristics, and if the substitute can replicate these, it can be ‘nativized’ (Douglas, 1984b; Powers & Powers, 1984) and used as an analogue to the original one. Sometimes, additional ingredients may have to be used to obtain a better match between the two foods, or the correct ‘flavour profile’ (Rozin, 2000) (e.g. adding vinegar to semolina and/or ground rice to obtain a comparable level of sourness). Consequently, food prepared from a substitute, or substitutes, retains its native name, and can be used as a symbol of ethnic identity. “Therefore one does not have to be authentic to be ethnic”, as Kalcik (1984: 56) concisely puts it. Substitutes are especially relevant for (West) African migrants whose traditional meals are based on a large component of starchy staples which

are not necessarily readily available, or affordable, in the new environment. Any food- or nutrition-related research among these people should take the role of substitutes into consideration.

In the context of migration, when substitutes are used in the replacement of original ingredients, change can take place at several levels. Not only does the nutritional content of the food change, taste changes too. Furthermore, as the example of *fufu* shows, the mode of preparation can alter (from pounding tubers in a mortar in the back yard to mixing powders in a saucepan in the kitchen) as well as the division of labour in regard to the preparation of the food (from a combined effort to an individual one). Despite all these changes, the final outcome remains unchanged as far as its identity is concerned: It has the same structure as the original food, the appearance, consistency and texture being analogous. It enables the preparation of a dish with the same format (e.g. *fufu* and soup) and the same balance of flavours (e.g. bland staple, fiery sauce) as the real one. It is relished and consumed in a similar fashion (e.g. with fingers) and provides a similar level of satisfaction or satiety (heavy vs. light food). What the research also shows is that the substitute can 'overtake' the original food in the sense that its quality is perceived to be superior to the one it replaces. With time people adapt to its taste and method of preparation and prefer it to the original one.

The research also highlights that substitutes can mean different things for the people involved. For some it is a replacement, while others perceive it to be a new foodstuff with a new name albeit with similar characteristics to the original one. They may still accept it as part of their own food culture (e.g. *banku* vs. 'semolina'); it can happen in a situation when the original foodstuff becomes easily available in the new environment. Hence, substitutes can increase the variety of food classified as part of the food culture under inspection. Moreover,

some use the substitute as it was originally intended, i.e. not as a substitute, but as a new alternative staple or ingredient (e.g. couscous).

Considering these outcomes, Koctürk's theory of changing food habits is flawed or inadequate, as it fails to consider the role of substitutes in the maintenance of the structure and identity of dishes (Koctürk-Runefors, 1991; Koctürk, 1995). According to Koctürk (1995), it is hard to compose culture-specific meals if the correct staple is not available. In other words, it cannot be substituted with another item without changing the affiliation of the dish. However, as the research shows, the cultural affiliation of the meal is not necessarily lost or changed when the main staple is replaced with another one – or with a combination of staples or ingredients – if the resulting food has similar cultural characteristics as the original one.

Focusing further on Koctürk's model, this study shows that the role of some 'accessory foods' is more central to the survival of a food tradition than her model presents. Many of the accessory foods listed by Koctürk (1995) are important in providing the right cultural characteristics of a food or a dish. Spices such as pungent chillies (powder used as a substitute for fresh chillies) impart a burning sensation. When this sensation has been part of the eating experience of nearly every meal since childhood, food without it loses one of its vital characteristics and may no longer be perceived as part of the cultural tradition, or even palatable. For example, while *hot* tomato sauce plays a central role in Ghanaian food custom, a tomato sauce without chilli pepper is rather an Italian concoction. Hence, not only does a food tradition suffer in the absence of this particular accessory food, it is vital for its survival. Red palm oil is another 'accessory food' which gives a characteristic Ghanaian or African flavour to many dishes. According to Rozin, fats and oils are "among the most effective flavouring agents

because they both carry their own unique flavours and are a powerful conveyors of other flavours.” (Rozin, 2000: 136)

Consequently, the findings suggest that Koctürk’s (1995: 4) theory that a diet begins to alter with the addition of new types of accessory foods to different complements and finally to the incorporation of new staple foods is not necessarily valid for all cultures or situations. The Ghanaian case highlights that staples can change without considerable alteration to the identity or meaning of the dish. However, Koctürk is correct in assuming that the foods she lists as complements can be sometimes exchanged without endangering an entire food tradition. The replacement of fish with grilled chicken in the three part Ghanaian meal is an example of this.

Based on the findings of the research, I would also suggest a change to Douglas and Nicod’s (1974) assumption that in highly structured parts of the diet (e.g. a typical Ghanaian evening meal) people are only receptive to improved quality in the traditional foods. The basic idea is accurate; however, it should include the notion of substitutes. In highly structured parts of the diet, people are receptive to new foods as well, if they are used as a substitute for unavailable ingredients *and* have similar cultural characteristics to the ones they replace. On the other hand, the findings support the idea that in the less structured parts (e.g. breakfast and lunch) there is the possibility of introducing totally new kinds of foods, with new tastes and smells, and “cheap substitutes” (Douglas & Nicod, 1974: 744).

The research shows that the changes in ‘Ghanaian’ meals are happening, quite predictably, at two levels in London, that of the first and second generation migrants: Although first generation migrants may eat English or other European food too, when it comes to Ghanaian food, they are conservative and maintain the structure, appearance, texture and ‘taste balance’ of typical Ghanaian foods and dishes, by either using substitutes for both staples and the sauces, or using

original ingredients. Shared cultural rules in regard to food preparation, combination of foodstuffs, and meal format ensure that the resulting dishes, often created without any original Ghanaian foodstuffs, resemble very much the original ones, hence symbolising Ghanaian or tribal food. Ghanaians in the diaspora scoop up palmnut soup with *fufu* using their fingers just like their counterparts in Ghana.

The second generation, or young British Ghanaians, who cook for themselves are actively transforming Ghanaian meals to suit their palates and aspirations. In many instances, because of the lack of familiarity or limited skills, 'lack of time' and/or fear of weight gain, substitute staples are not prepared; instead, quicker, easier and lighter alternatives are opted for, such as rice or potato, or other 'European' or 'international' staples, such as pasta or couscous. Less effort is made to obtain original ingredients and more emphasis is placed on convenience. Young adults mix and match elements from other cuisines with ease to fit their lifestyles, shifting identities and current interests (see Harbottle, 2000). Yet the Ghanaian aspect of the truly hybrid meal is retained through adherence to elements of the meal format and to some of the basic cooking and combination rules and methods, as well as through the use of particular spices for creating a similar taste balance. The process of acculturation is not clear-cut and it frequently contains elements of other culinary traditions which surround the youngsters in the multicultural metropolis of London. For example, they accept and appreciate other Black (food) cultures (e.g. Nigerian or West Indian) that surround them in the capital, something that their parents do less eagerly. What Thomas describes here in relation to the Vietnamese in Australia is pretty much valid for young Ghanaians in London too:

in Australia, the eating styles of Vietnamese people are being transformed both temporally and generationally, as Vietnamese food becomes 'Australianised' and Australian food becomes 'Vietnamised'. This process of engagement is no simple borrowing or translation but a process of cultural creation with the material, cultural and social resources available in the diaspora. (Thomas, 2004: 55)

At the end of the day, the identities of the dishes prepared by young British Ghanaians are as mixed, or as coherent, as the identities of their creators.

The findings of the research are similar to Harbottle's who noted that among Iranians in Britain, there is considerable continuity as regards cooking methods and preference for familiar taste themes (Harbottle, 2000). They are also comparable to those of Goode et al. who noticed that among the Italian Americans the focal point of continuity in the food system were the rules for constructing and scheduling 'gravy meals' which persisted over time, not the frequency of pasta or tomato sauce (Goode et al., 1984b). Continuity and change in the system were strongly related to the manipulation of the repertory of formats. For example, while formats such as gravy meals and buffet feasts were highly content specific, platter and party formats were open to negotiation. New American food items entered the system primarily through these open formats.

In a similar fashion, one can differentiate between the various Ghanaian meal formats. The two-part meal format consisting of a staple and a *soup* is more stable than two-part or three-part meal formats which contain either a stew or an uncooked sauce (e.g. rice and stew; or banku, fried fish, fresh pepper and tomato sauce). These two and three-part meals also classify as platter formats, and new food items – not substitutes – and elements enter the Ghanaian food system mainly through these formats.

### *Alone or together?*

Since most recent sociological research into and writing about the meal as a social event, or commensality, has been on Western populations (Holm, 2001b; Kemmer et al., 1998b; Kristensen et al., 2002; Marshall & Anderson, 2002; Sobal,

2000; Sobal et al., 2002; Sobal & Nelson, 2003), the study broadens the perspective by looking at the situation in a West African diasporic community. The notion of family meals, and the significance of company and commensality during 'proper meals', have some quite different meanings in the Ghanaian context.

Among Ghanaians in London, although joint family meals may occur especially in households which have adopted a more Western lifestyle including Western food, there was not much evidence of it in this study. It happened regularly only in one household headed by a well-educated single mother who incorporated European food in the weekly menu on a regular basis. As I have already concluded, it seems that many Ghanaians don't share the Western *desire* to eat meals together as a family (Holm, 2001b; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). In this respect they differ from many other ethnic minority groups whose culture emphasises the custom of sharing food and eating with close kin (Sobal & Nelson, 2003).

Instead, a number of Ghanaian households in London are truly sites of multiple consumption practices, eating being very individualistic at times in the sense that family members eat different food at different times in different locations of the home. This may be influenced by different work schedules in the households. Also, some Ghanaian households are spread across the globe with one or more family members living in Ghana (either a child or children, or a spouse) which accentuates this point. Still, company is not seen to be essential for the enjoyment of a proper meal within the home. Eating alone does not make the meal less 'real' (i.e. a snack) or reduce the pleasure of eating. This is contrary to the perception in many other cultures, where "solo eating is generally seen as abnormal, undesired, and even unhealthy" (Sobal, 2000: 120) or associated with eating snacks or other 'minor meals'. On the other hand, a recent Scandinavian



study showed that people living alone did not necessarily eat in a less structured manner compared to those who lived with family (Holm, 2001b).

As already clarified, the situation in Ghanaian households in the diaspora can be explained largely by the customary set-up of families in many ethnic groups in Ghana whereby husbands do not live with their wives in the same compound house, but receive food from them and eat it alone, or in the company of other men (Clark, 1994). Although traditionally the cooking of the evening meal by wives is synonymous with marriage and has strong sexual connotations (Abu, 1983), commensality is not inherent in marital relationships<sup>146</sup>.

The circumstances in Ghana as well as in the diaspora reflect to an extent Murcott's notion that "simultaneity is not the only way in which a meal may be shared." (Murcott, 1982: 693) Murcott's concept of the 'plateful' is valid particularly in cases where family members share the same food, even if they eat it at different times or in different locations.

It is the dinner's familiarity, the firm establishment of its rules which provides that reassurance, commonality and communality. (Murcott, 1982: 693)

However, if all family members eat different food and enjoy it separately, then the only common denominator is the person who prepares and serves the food. In the diaspora, Ghanaian mothers ensure that family members eat a hot meal, not a snack, which in effect is not regarded as food. The research into food-work showed that some Ghanaian women have developed strategies, which enable them to satisfy the diverse preferences of their partners and offspring. The most noteworthy is cooking several dishes in bulk at weekends and freezing part of them for the week ahead. Hence, family members are united by the consumption

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<sup>146</sup> One important reason for favouring duo-local residence of spouses is the fact that among some ethnic groups, in particular the Akan, marriage is potentially polygynous (Abu, 1983).

of food prepared by the mother. However, the social significance of the family meal or commensality is lost.

In actual fact, joint family meals around a table in the Western context seem to be a myth to some extent, or “an ideal-typical model of the middle-class and (respectable) working-class family” (Murcott, 1997: 44). The situation in Ghana and among Ghanaian families in London is seemingly similar to that in the West in the past. Murcott (1997) refers to the fact that in some communities, the working class wife was more like a servant or a waitress at a meal than a fellow diner. Poor households lacked tables. In upper-class families, on the other hand, children never ate with the rest of the family, and their food was quite different from that of the adults. Diner (2001) also describes how men generally ate first in poor Italian households in Italy and women later after serving the men. In a “system of gender deference based on male superiority” (Diner, 2001: 36), the woman kept the least possible food for herself and her children and always the best for her husband.

However, despite everything, company, or commensality, *is* important for Ghanaians in the diaspora. In Ghana, people seldom eat alone, because there is usually always someone in the (compound) house to share a meal with, either members of the extended family, or other people. Yet, traditionally people eat in groups subdivided along the lines of sex, and to some extent age and generation (Dei, 1991).

The familiar eating groups observed in the households and compounds include husbands alone, male adults, female adults, male children, female children, all children together, wife and children, and grandmother and grandchildren (Dei, 1991: 42).

Even in the homes of the educated elite, there are usually more people around than just the nuclear family (Oppong, 1974; Oppong, 1975):

their household may shelter one or two or a continual stream of relatives coming to stay with them, to be provided with the necessities of life, to help with the chores or simply visiting. (Oppong, 1974: 84)

Traditionally the common meal is a medium for building the relationships between consanguines, along the patrilineal or matrilineal line, not spouses. The extended family system, by its very nature, emphasises kinship much more than the marital bond (Nukunya, 1992). Especially among the Ashanti, the conjugal family is weak in residential, economic and emotional terms in comparison with the matrilineage, and not least so in urban settings (Abu, 1983).

In the diaspora, for many Ghanaians commensality occurs in the 'public' realm rather than at home, i.e. at large formal social gatherings organised by other Ghanaians. I believe that people attend functions partly to strengthen their social networks but also out of the *need* to share food with others, in particular other *adults*, as they are unable to do so within the home. Social isolation compels people to seek companionship in larger circles.

Here you depend more on your friends, whereas in Ghana you depend on your family. For support, in order not to bear it all alone. Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) 2<sup>nd</sup>, pg 85

Although some Ghanaians have close and more distant relatives living in London, many rely on friends and less close acquaintances for commensality. They take the place of (extended) family members in Ghana. Through eating with them they satisfy "a need for interaction by a union with others, where conviviality establishes and reinforces social ties." (Sobal & Nelson, 2003: 181) For the same reason, Ghanaian restaurants attract groups of single men to share a meal together, as they lack their usual circle of kin or friends back in Ghana.

The quote below (also presented on p. 189) underlines part of the paradox in the Ghanaian community in London. It contains the words of a widow living with her 21-year old daughter, with whom she seldom eats as a family. This has been the case for many years, mainly due to Serwa's shift work as a midwife.

I think a lot Ghanaian life is centred around food. Culturally food seems to be something that unites us. So we sort of associate happiness, contentment, or helping each other by making meals, and .. It's a great relaxation thing. Even when somebody's parent or relative dies in Ghana, we meet, we have a social gathering, and then we eat. Serwa (hhM, Ewe, 50, 1969) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 771

In the diaspora, in many instances, food brings together not family members, but other fellow Ghanaians. The gender and generation gaps are obvious. As Ghanaians are not able to share the food they love with their nearest and dearest – the most common commensal circles in many other groups (Holm, 2001b; Sobal & Nelson, 2003) – they go further a field to seek the pleasure of a joint meal.

Consequently, among the Ghanaian community in London, it is possible to detect traces of both a 'structural individualism perspective' as well as a 'cultural values perspective', as presented by Sobal and Nelson (2003). While 'structural individualism' underlines the impact of social isolation and the "fast pace of mass society in a post-industrial era" as an impediment to commensal eating; 'cultural values' stresses the "strength of traditional normative pressures to engage in commensal eating with appropriate partners." (Sobal & Nelson, 2003: 182) The 'appropriate' partners for Ghanaians in London are in many cases not close kin, but other diasporic Ghanaians.

To conclude, migration to London and the associated busy and demanding lifestyle cannot be blamed alone for creating the situation in many Ghanaian households in which people eat without company or in a serial fashion. In many instances, spouses eat separately out of tradition. Hence, children seldom eat together with both parents at the same time, and often without any direct parental attendance. In Ghana this is an unlikely situation, as usually there is someone – even if not the parents – to keep them company and to supervise the meal. Consequently, in the diaspora, the children are the ones who miss out most. As the research shows, there is evidence of young Ghanaians not learning to eat

and cook typical Ghanaian food largely because of lack of time or involvement of parents. Considering the importance of the home and commensality to the transmission of ethnic identity, young British Ghanaians may lose a significant part of their Ghanaian identity sooner than desired.

But if you know the mum's working and you're at childminder or babysitter or whatever, you're not going to have time, you're not going to eat enough [of typical Ghanaian food] to say yes I like this or you are not going to eat it enough to get used to it to say this is my food, you know, that I want to eat. Emefa (hhM, 21) 1<sup>st</sup>, pg 330

### 7.2.2. Ethnic identity, post-colonialism and foodways

Addressing the second research question, a further theoretical contribution of the thesis is to the role of food in the symbolic reinforcement of cultural and ethnic identities. The research shows, among other things, that although Ghanaians in London downplay ethnic (i.e. tribal) differences in their community (see Elam et al., 2000), and there is a unified front as far as food at social gatherings and restaurants is concerned, in the private sphere, Ghanaians emphasise ethnic differences<sup>147</sup>. Despite the stress on difference and an apparent preference for staples linked with their own ethnic group or groups, there is evidence of border crossing and the amalgamation of habits among Ghanaians of different ethnic backgrounds. This is partly due to the convenience of some (substitute) staples and partly due to the increased variety of other foods.

Furthermore, while among first generation migrants in London it is possible to observe a shift in the emphasis from 'tribal' to 'Ghanaian' food, among the second generation, there is a further shift away from 'Ghanaian' or 'African' to more general 'black British' food. These shifts reflect concurrent changes in identities. A tribal identity, nevertheless, does not rule out British or hybrid identities.

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<sup>147</sup> This may actually not be the case elsewhere in the country where the size of the community is much smaller (Henry & Mohan, 2003).

The thesis also underlines the importance of the historical dimension in the analysis of migrant foodways by highlighting the way in which colonialism and post-colonialism have shaped the ethnic identities and food habits of migrants with a colonial past. In this thesis, the description on the influence on colonialism on the foodways and identities of Ghanaians and other West Africans has relied heavily on only a few sources, mainly Goody, Nukunya and Ikpe. I acknowledge that other sources on colonialism and post-colonialism could have been consulted and it may have affected the outcome. The term 'colonial' has been used here to refer to the time-period when colonial rulers influenced the society, culture and identities of the colonized people, and the term 'post-colonialism' to the aftermath of the colonial period and the legacy of colonialism. In the case of Ghana, the British undoubtedly affected the foodways and traditions of Ghanaians, but I do not imply that other influences were not in force, whether before, during or after the colonial period.

On the one hand, colonialism and post-colonialism generated hybrid identities, which means that a number of Ghanaians regarded English foods and food practices as part of their own food culture already in Ghana even though in the past these were mainly restricted to the elite or people in higher social positions (e.g. within families) and to formal restaurants. Migration to Britain, where formerly inaccessible ingredients were widely available and affordable, created an opportunity for many Ghanaians to emulate the privileged back home (Bourdieu, 1984) and use the foods as a symbol of their hybrid identities, and to indicate that they were progressive and civilized. They took on English breakfast traditions, as well as the roast dinner at weekends and at Christmas, with relative ease, and displayed pies and sandwiches at social functions and other festive occasions.

These selected 'English' food habits are part and parcel of Ghanaian food culture inasmuch as when Ghanaians elsewhere in the diaspora (e.g. Germany) fancy a change from their typical Ghanaian fare they resort to a roast dinner, along the lines of the English model, rather than cooking a typical dish of their country of residence. The fact that Ghanaians are happy eating characteristically English food indicates that they view the past colonial contact with Britain in a positive fashion. This is unlike the early Irish settlers in America who did not want to imitate the food habits of their former colonial rulers (Diner, 2001). They saw the Protestant British elite responsible for their plight in Ireland – for their reliance on potato as practically their only source of nourishment, and even guilty for the hundreds of thousands who died as a result of the Famine, causing a massive wave of young, poor Irishmen and women to migrate to America. Diner accounts:

As a colonial power, the British made no effort to enculturate the Irish to a 'better' food system, to teach them to eat as their 'betters' did, and to encourage them to become British. As colonized people, the Irish rejected the styles of the hated occupiers of their land. They had few venues for learning what rich folks ate, and few reasons to want to eat like the alien elite in their midst. (Diner, 2001: 222)

Evidently, the Ghanaian experience was more or less opposite to that of the Irish. On the other hand, this led to a further impact of colonialism and post-colonialism, to the denigration of *African* heritage and the veneration of Western values, manners and looks. Apart from creating the situation above, i.e. elites and people in higher positions taking on habits of the colonial rulers (Goody, 1982), it meant that Ghanaians in London in the 1950s, 60s and 70s did not feel confident in using their own cultural food as an expression of their ethnic identity when confronted with people from the dominant culture (i.e. the white British). The lack of self-confidence extended to other visible symbols of ethnic identity, such as native language, traditional clothing and hair-style, all which were suppressed in preference for Western styles of self-expression and forms of behaviour, as Dorinda Hafner, a successful Ghanaian cook, author and media personality, here describes:

When I arrived in England, it was important to me to be hip, and the hippest thing to do was to shed my blackness. I wanted to be accepted, to blend in. I straightened my hair, wore make-up, and packed away my Ghanaian fabrics and clothes to be replaced by jeans, dresses, blouses, and skirts. I accessorized. And of course, the most important accessory is one's attitude, one's mannerisms and accent. (Hafner, 1996: 181)

Ghanaians' attitude at the time was similar to that of Cypriots in England, who, as a consequence of the historical subjection of colonialism, had a sense of affinity with British culture and a strong desire to be accepted by the British (Robins & Aksoy, 2001).

In the early days of migration, the expression of their own particular culture and identity was not a major concern or issue for them. Turkish Cypriots just got on with things. ... They never aspired to stand out, never wanted to rock the boat. (Robins & Aksoy, 2001: 690-691)

Although adaptation or transformation happened mostly in the early years after migration, there are still signs of it in present-day London; hence, for example, the 'preference' by the majority of Ghanaians for nondescript food at work and at formal fund-raising dinners, as well as Western style clothing for everyday use<sup>148</sup>.

In this two-way fashion, post-colonialism slowed down the establishment of Ghanaian food-related businesses in London, in particular, restaurants, as they were liable to scrutiny from outsiders. Only with the rise in self esteem and community pride, did food start to be openly used as a means to celebrate '*Ghanaianness*' in the commercial and communal realm.

As a third point, colonialism and post-colonialism have also facilitated the creation of a national Ghanaian cuisine, which is perhaps most obvious when viewing the situation from abroad. Interestingly, in their article on identity and changing patterns of food consumption in Ghana, Goody and Goody (1995) do not refer to this or articulate clearly about the importance of food for 'Ghanaian' identities. Rather they emphasise the shifting nature of dietary habits, the impact

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<sup>148</sup> I was told that there were still Ghanaians in London who thought that "the English person is a superior human being, thus to be Ghanaian is inferior, therefore eating Ghanaian food is perpetrating their inferiority." Kwesi (Krobo, 50+) Interview summary p. xii



of Europeans on the diets and practices of the educated middle class, and the lack of *haute cuisine* for festive and state occasions. They believe that earlier in Africa, food practices did not form an important part in defining the identities of communities. Even today, as far as West Africa is concerned the

process of nation-building has still not produced any major culture of food attached to the new nations, although there are some minor dishes, such as Jolof rice from Senegal, which may play this part. (Goody & Goody, 1995: 12)

According to the authors, there are clearer differences between anglophone and francophone areas, in which new forms of consumption derive from the metropolitan areas. They also maintain that the identities of educated Ghanaians contain a “significant ‘global’ element” and refer to the thousands who have migrated abroad:

To these migrants, home cooking tastes best, even if they have to adapt; *fufu* or porridge is what a real meal needs. Globalisation occurs, but it does not eliminate other identities, even though it flattens them. (Goody & Goody, 1995: 13)

I believe that it is exactly these migrants in the diaspora who have shown the importance of food to their ‘*Ghanaian*’, and even their ‘*tribal*’ identities and who have helped to establish and cement the idea of a *national Ghanaian cuisine*, in which regional dishes play an important role.

The research provides evidence of the spread of ethnic dishes beyond their regions of origin in Ghana, i.e. diminishing regional contrasts, which can be seen as part and parcel of the process of amalgamation fuelled by colonialism and subsequent urbanisation.

Colonialism and later independence brought different peoples together as one nation-state with the same citizenship and common national aspirations as well as institutions which cut across traditional group boundaries. (Nukunya, 1992: 224)

In London, Ghanaian migrants originating from different parts of Ghana (albeit mostly from the southern half), in a similar fashion to early Italian migrants who settled in America’s larger cities, “lived in proximity to each other and saw and

smelled, and over time, tasted each others' local and regional foods." (Diner, 2001: 53) Unlike the Italians, however, who were able to obtain familiar foodstuffs with relative ease, Ghanaians in the early years had to resort to substitutes to create the basic dishes which had sustained them back home. Despite this, and partly *because* of this, they started eating foods symbolising ethnic groups other than their own and using them to uphold their '*Ghanaian*' or '*African*' identities. In addition, due to the lack of special regional ingredients, sauces became more unified. Yet, Ghanaians were resourceful and made the most of available foodstuffs, creating new stews and soups which they labelled as '*Ghanaian*'.

Therefore, although some foods and dishes have been re-created or even invented in the diaspora, they have become fixtures in Ghanaian homes in London, as well as elsewhere in the diaspora (Tuomainen, 1995; Tuomainen, 1996). Newcomers are introduced to them as soon as they arrive in the country, and in this fashion they are bestowed part of *the common Ghanaian diasporic identity*. For many, learning to make *fufu* from 'mash and farina' or *banku* from 'semolina and ground rice' is part of the secret of surviving in new surroundings and, many a times, harsh realities. Although the substitutes invoke neophobia (Fischler, 1980; Fischler, 1988), like any new ingredients or foods, Ghanaians are prepared to adjust their taste buds and to conform, because they realise that these 'familiar' foods provide a better base for confronting life in the new environment (see Hage, 1997).

Furthermore, although the repertoires of food served at Ghanaian restaurants and social functions differ to a degree, together they provide a picture of a Ghanaian food culture no longer split along regional lines. People preparing food for functions, as well as restaurateurs, consciously or unconsciously seem to strive to create a *unified Ghanaian identity*. Although restaurants steer clear of English food, it is not totally excluded from the picture, as it appears frequently in

the form of snack foods at functions, representing the food regularly consumed by Ghanaians within their homes.

Similarly to early Italian restaurants in America, which promoted a national Italian cuisine rather than regional cuisines (Diner, 2001: 68), it has made good business sense for Ghanaian restaurants to highlight the idea of Ghanaian as opposed to, for example, Ashanti or Ga cuisines, because they are surrounded by former residents of various Ghanaian towns and regions. The selection of dishes in the restaurants, although not fully representative of all regions, provides the *core* of the new *national Ghanaian cuisine*.

In this way, in the diaspora, dishes once linked with certain regions and tribes of Ghana, have become symbols of the whole country (see Sutton, 2001). Research carried out in commercial eating places in Ghana supports the particular selection of dishes as symbols of the nationwide cuisine, although one of the findings of the study by Ayernor (1998) was that only a limited number of major staples had been utilised<sup>149</sup>. Before seeing the research report I had already derived a similar conclusion in that the menus of the eating places in London provide a misleading impression of Ghanaian cuisine, one which lacks imagination or zest. As a result of the research into Ghanaian food culture, I ended up with a long list of dishes, based on a great number of staple foods and a variety of relishes and soups. Furthermore, data collected in Ghanaian food stores also indicated that Ghanaian cuisine is much more diverse and imaginative than what one may observe in restaurants. I got the impression that many Ghanaians in London, even some of the restaurateurs, aren't actually aware of all the numerous dishes that are part of the culinary heritage of Ghana. Without delving into this matter further, it would

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<sup>149</sup> A recent survey of a total of 616 commercial eating places in different areas of Ghana found out that foods served in such venues included rice, which was the food most frequently served in commercial eating places and at roadside vendor points; plantain; maize - especially in the form of *banku* and *kenkey*; millet prepared as *two zaafi* particularly in northern parts of the country; and *fufu* (prepared mainly from cassava and plantain) as the major dish particularly in the southern part of Ghana (Ayernor, 1998).

be interesting to know to what extent the reliance on oral tradition in passing on knowledge about food and cooking, as well as the lack of comprehensive cookbooks on Ghanaian food culture, have contributed to this situation.

To conclude, foodways reflect the fluid nature of ethnic identity. The thesis confirms previous findings that in the migration context dishes and foods linked with regions and ethnic groups of the native country are frequently used as symbols of the whole country. In the new surroundings, migrants often emphasise a common national identity through shared foodways, but in certain circumstances, regional or 'tribal' identities and foods are still of importance. This is especially the case for first generation migrants, less so for their descendants, who rather associate ethnic food with the nation, or with a more comprehensive reach (e.g. continent). The thesis also shows that the process of acculturation is not unidirectional. Like the sense of ethnic identity, foodways of migrants change over time, and fluctuate: the preference for more traditional foodways may occur after a long period of more 'acculturated' habits.

The literature emphasizes the importance of the maintenance of ethnic foodways as a marker of ethnic identity among migrants, often portrayed by the prompt establishment of food-related businesses, such as among the Chinese in Britain. The case study of Ghanaians, nevertheless, shows that the initial reaction after migration differs among migrant groups. Not all have the desire to express their traditional foodways in public, especially if they do not feel confident in using their own cultural food as an expression of their ethnic identity and rather want to blend in with the mainstream society. The reasons for a diminished self-confidence regarding the public display of foodways and other visible symbols of ethnic identity undoubtedly vary – aptly highlighted by Harbottle's study among the Iranian community – but colonialism and post-colonialism have been identified here as an influence that can still be reckoned with.

### 7.2.3. Gender, foodways and identities

Addressing the third research question on the role of gender in maintaining foodways and identities, the thesis also extends understanding of the gendered nature of migration and the role of women in the migration process. At the community level, looking at the development of Ghanaian food culture in London, the thesis underlines the role of gender in the establishment of small ethnic food-related businesses and in the shaping of a migrant or ethnic minority food culture as a whole. The study shows that Ghanaian women have by no means been passive spouses, or exploited workers, but rather initiators and the key actors, and some have continued the traditional role of trading either locally or transnationally.

Quite simply, without Ghanaian women there would be no Ghanaian food culture in London. There would be no Ghanaian food stores, no Ghanaian ‘fast food’ (i.e. *kenkey*), no Ghanaian restaurants, and no Ghanaian fare at functions. Ghanaian men alone would not have achieved it. This is unlike many other migrant and ethnic minority communities in which men have played the key role in establishing grocery stores and catering businesses for other fellow ethnics, and the wider community (Basu, 2002; Harbottle, 1997a; Harbottle, 2000; Saifullah Khan, 1977). Although Ghanaian men have finally entered the food retail business (albeit frequently in their mother’s footsteps), and the catering business as managers – indicating partly modified traditional gender roles – Ghanaian women are the main actors behind the scene despite the arduous work and unfriendly working hours. In Hafner’s words, Ghanaian women are “adventurous entrepreneurs, the power brokers behind the men.” (Hafner, 1996: 44)

Furthermore, although there are no signs of it yet, should Ghanaian restaurants experience a boom in London or elsewhere in the country, it would almost

certainly lead to an increased migration of *females* from Ghana<sup>150</sup>. This would be different from the situation among other migrant groups, such as the Chinese, whose catering industry in London and elsewhere in the UK has drawn primarily male restaurant workers from Hong Kong (Watson, 1975).

Ghanaian women have entered Britain in the past with similar aspirations and ambitions as their male counterparts, with education and/or economic advancement as their main goals, the latter being achieved eventually by some entrepreneurs through the establishment of food and catering businesses, a sphere already dominated by females in their native country. Although further in-depth research is needed to establish their migration histories and experiences as business women and caterers, the findings of this study indicate that their position is unlike that of many other migrant women, such as large numbers of women from the Indian sub-continent (Gardner, 2002; Werbner, 1990), who have entered the country as spouses and whose husbands have fulfilled the main economic role, often involved in a small family owned food or catering business (Bradby, 1999).

The experiences of Ghanaian women in London are not necessarily shared by other Ghanaian women in the diaspora, for example by those based in Toronto, where structural barriers in the labour market, among other things, have hindered their economic advancement to a considerable degree (Wong, 2000). It is also likely that their position differs to that of recent migrant women from Ghana who may be in the country through illegal means (e.g. overstaying a visitor's visa) (see Mazzucato, 2005). On the other hand, there is no way of knowing to what extent these recent migrants are involved in the cottage industry producing Ghanaian food for the wider community.

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<sup>150</sup> The owners of one of the restaurants were planning to open another venue in Brighton with a female relative from Ghana taking charge of the cooking.

Indeed, the manufacture of *kenkey* within the home can be seen as a fitting job for women who are unqualified and/or illegally in the country, although whether this actually is the case needs to be confirmed by further research. There is evidence that *kenkey* is made by women who have legalised their status and have a full-time occupation, even a degree. *Kenkey* – a lifeline for many Ghanaians in the diaspora who consume it – is a means for obtaining additional income, very much needed by those with responsibilities and commitments transnationally (see Mazzucato, 2005; Wong, 2000). Although a larger scale, industrial production, with standards of hygiene and other controls (apparently taking place somewhere in the USA [Adwoa, 2<sup>nd</sup>]), might be beneficial to the consumer, the current unregulated production offers women a way to earn an income which fits in with their otherwise busy lifestyles.

Ghanaian women in Ghana have a long tradition as traders and producers of food. In England, as transnational importers, vendors and as local formal and informal producers of Ghanaian food, Ghanaian women have been a major force in the regeneration of the Ghanaian community in London by establishing the ethnic institutions considered vital for the wellbeing, even *survival*, of migrants in the new host country. Unlike Ghanaians elsewhere in the diaspora (Mazzucato, 2005; Wong, 2000), many Ghanaians view their stay in London as permanent. The development of the dynamic cottage industry supplying shops and individuals with *kenkey* is one of the best examples of the social symbolic construction of home abroad. In Gardner's words, "as their communities are recreated globally, they bring the *desh* (home) to *bidesh* (countries abroad)." (Gardner, 1995: 281) The new host country is no longer foreign, but 'home' or part of Ghana. In this process, the efforts of Ghanaian business women, whether part of the official or unofficial economy, have been used to inspire community pride and cohesion, and have helped maintain ethnic identities.

In the private sphere of the home, similarly to Ghanaians elsewhere in the diaspora (Mazzucato, 2005; Wong, 2000), many Ghanaian women in Britain not only have multiple roles and jobs, but also multiple obligations and duties. Apart from being responsible for cooking in their own household, they support other kin and friends in time of need through the interhousehold transfer of meals. Ghanaian women shoulder in this fashion responsibility for the welfare of others, which is similar to other ethnic minority groups (Gardner, 2002; Werbner, 1990). Unlike many other communities, however, a number of Ghanaians make use of the tradition of fostering and sharing of childcare with kin. A full-time occupation, family commitments and other demands and pressures on the women – many of whom form single-parent households – leads to sending a child or children to Ghana to be looked after by grandparents or other relatives. The truly transnational nature of some households not only influences the food economy of these households in London, but also the food habits of the children sent home.

To conclude, through the study of food provision and meal preparation in both the private and public spheres of a West African community in London, this thesis extends the current discussion on gendered understandings of migration, by uncovering the ways in which men *and* women recreate families and communities in a new country, and how a tradition of trading in Ghana is continued transnationally and in a new setting.

### **7.3. Main contributions of study**

This case study provides empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge through the gendered study of the relationships between migration, foodways, and ethnic identity. Some of the findings are transferable to the experiences of other groups of migrants from former colonies, for example, West Africans in France.



In this thesis, the notion of substitution has been shown to be important in maintaining foodways and ethnic identities, and to have been overlooked and not addressed by Koçtürk and other researchers. An approach that focuses on food items alone is inadequate and a structuralist approach is necessary to capture the true nature of change and continuity in food habits.

The notions of the 'family meal' in the literature have been shown to be ethnocentrically Western and the Ghanaian family meal is possible without company, or commensality, and in line with kinship and household structures and patterns in Ghana.

The thesis shows the vital role of women in maintaining and transforming foodways and in maintaining ethnic identities that have tribal (Fanti, Ashanti, etc.), regional (Akan), national (Ghanaian), continental (African), and transnational (black British) elements. The food mirrors the fluidity and hybridity of the ethnic identities and becomes a marker or signifier of both belonging to these different groups and of differences amongst them.

Women's work in the home and the community and as informal and formal traders is significant in maintaining and transforming foodways. Women continue their roles as traders and sellers of food and cooked food transnationally, as informal traders between Ghana and the UK, and within London as producers of *kenkey* and other food. Within the domestic sphere, there is considerable reciprocal food exchange and food preparation for communal social gatherings.

This study of the relationships between migration, foodways, ethnic identities and gender among Ghanaians in London therefore makes both a theoretical and empirical contribution to knowledge that may form a springboard for further comparative research in this area.

## GLOSSARY

Abolo	Baked or steamed corn dough 'cakes', cooked in leaves
Agushi	Melon seeds, usually ground before cooking
Akpler	Fermented corn and cassava dough dumplings, similar to banku, but softer
Akyeke	Grated, steamed cassava mixed with palm oil
Ampesie	Boiled pieces of yam, cocoyam, plantain, and/or cassava
Apotoyowa	Dish for grinding pepper, tomatoes etc.
Atwemo	Little twisted biscuits made from wheat flour, fried in hot fat
Banku	Fermented corn dough porridge formed into a ball
Borodie	Plantain
Corn dough	Fermented maize dough; serves as a basis of many staple dishes
Deahou	See tuo zaafi
Dokono	See kenkey
Dzemkple	Roasted ground corn cooked in a stew, served with additional stew and meat, fish or crab
Eba	Porridge or dumplings made from gari
Emutuo	See omo tuo
Eto	See oto
Fufu	Pounded boiled cassava and plantain (or cassava and cocoyam; or yam) formed into balls
Garden eggs	Small round cream-coloured egg plant ( <i>Solanum melongena</i> )
Gari	Fermented grated cassava
Gari foto	Gari mixed in a stew, fried fish or meat and eggs
Groundnut soup	Groundnut paste added to soup, see light soup
Hausa koko	See koko
Jollof rice	Rice cooked with onions, tomatoes, meat etc to form a 'risotto'

Kelewele	Small pieces of fried plantain, seasoned with ginger
Kenkey	Fermented corn dough dumplings wrapped in leaves
Fanti kenkey	Kenkey wrapped in plantain leaves
Ga kenkey	Kenkey wrapped in corn husks
Kobi	Salt fish with a strong smell, also called stinkfish
Koko	A thin gruel made from fermented corn dough
Kokonte	Porridge made from cassava flour
Kyinkyinga	Grilled pieces of meat, often served on skewers
Light soup	Soup made with meat and/or smoked fish, tomatoes, onion, pepper, garden eggs
Mpotompoto	Yam cubes boiled with meat and/or smoked fish, onions and tomatoes
Nkatenkwan	Groundnut soup and palmnut soup combined
Nkontomire	Cocoyam leaves
Nkwan	See light soup
Omo tuo	Balls of mashed rice
Oto	Mashed boiled yam or plantain, mixed with onions, palm oil, etc. and boiled egg
Palmnut soup	Soup made with the liquid and pounded pulp of oil palm fruit ( <i>Elaeis guineensis</i> ), also called palm soup
Puna yam	A variety of white yam ( <i>Dioscorea cayensis</i> subsp. <i>rotundata</i> )
Redred	Fried ripe plantain with bean stew
Shito	Hot pepper sauce with dried fish and shrimps, served as a cold condiment
Suya	See kyinkyinga
Tilapia	A fresh-water fish
Tuo Zaafi	Stiff porridge made from millet or sorghum (guinea-corn) flour, or maize flour
Waakye	Rice cooked with (black-eyed) beans, served with stew

Wele	Scraped and soaked cowhide cooked in soup
Yakayeke	Steamed grated cassava
Yokegari	Black-eyed beans with gari, served with shito, or gravy and fried fish

Sources: (Essuman, 1990; Mensah et al., 2002; Otoo & Otoo, 1997; Whitby, 1968)

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## APPENDICES

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## Appendix A – Questionnaire for storekeepers

A study on Ghanaian food culture in London

Questions for proprietors of stores selling Ghanaian/African  
food produce - confidential

### Name and location of store

1. What is the name and address of your  
store/market stall?

Opening hours:

### Year of establishment

2. Which year was the store first  
opened?
3. When did you become the proprietor  
of the store?

### Origin of proprietor

4. What is your country of origin?
5. If Ghanaian, which tribe do you  
belong to?

### Main customers

6. Who are your main customers?  
*Please list them by country of origin -  
the largest, or most important, customer  
group first.*

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6

[illegible]


### Most popular food produce among Ghanaians

#### 10. Which are the most popular food products among your Ghanaian customers?

*Please indicate this in the above table by numbering the products in order of popularity in the **second** column. Please number the 10 most popular items.*

### Price of food products

#### 11. What are the average prices for the above items?

*Please add the price in the **third** column of the table. Please indicate the price per pound or kilogram, per tin or other appropriate measure.*

### Origin of food products

#### 12. What is the main country of origin of the food product listed above?

*Please indicate this in the **fourth** column. You can also mention the second most important country of origin.*

### Seasonal variation in availability

#### 13. Which food products in the above table are affected by seasonal availability?

*Please indicate this by ticking the **fifth** column for the affected products.*

**Seasonal variation in price of food produce****14. How does the seasonal variability affect the price of the above food products?**

*Please indicate the lowest and highest prices of the product in the **sixth** column.*

**Ordering of supplies****15. Do you import products directly from Ghana?**

**Please check that all questions are completed**

**THANK YOU**

**Please return the completed questionnaire in the postage paid envelope provided to:**

**Helena Tuomainen, School of Health and Social Studies,  
University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL**

**For information or requests about the study, please telephone  
Ms Helena Tuomainen 020-7927 2695 or 07866-795 296 or Prof Gillian  
Hundt 02476-573 814**

## **Appendix B – List of interview topics for restaurants**

### **Establishment**

- When
- Why
- Name of restaurant
- Location
- Any Problems?
- Type of service
- Other restaurants in the area
- Experience at beginning

### **Staff**

- Tribe
- Gender – esp. chefs
- Experiences

### **Customers**

- Country of origin / Tribe
- Most important group
- Gender
- Type of customers
- Social status/class

### **Food produce**

- Availability of Ghanaian/African foodstuffs
- Origin
- Suppliers
- Kenkey
- Banku
- Fufu

### **Menu**

- Selection of dishes
- Stability of menu
- Price
- Preparation of particular dishes

### **Serving of dishes**

- e.g fufu with soup



## Appendix C – Details of households and other informants

All names are pseudonyms, and chosen according to the language of the original name.

### ***Household A (hhA)***

**Lillian** lives alone with her 11-year old son **Kwame**, although her partner **Robert** lives nearby. In the past they lived together. Their 3-year old son is in Ghana with Lillian's father and stepmother. Lillian is a Fanti and in her early 30s, Richard is a Ga and in his mid 30s. Lillian migrated to the UK in 1989, although she was born in the UK; Robert migrated in 1983. Kwame, from an earlier relationship, migrated in 1990. He goes to Gloria's (hhB) after school. They live in a council flat in north London. Lillian is a secretary, Robert works for a garage. Lillian's mother lives in London too.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Lillian 3; Robert 1; Kwame 1.

### ***Household B (hhB)***

**Gloria** is 45+ and a Fanti, like her husband **Henry** who is 65+. They have four daughters, all born in the UK: **Angela** (19), **Frances** (16), **Deborah** (11), and **Gloria** (9). Henry has at least one other daughter from a previous marriage. He migrated to the UK in the 1960s; Gloria in 1978 to join her family. They live in north London in a semi-detached house. Gloria is a child minder, a former canteen chef. Henry is a retired lawyer.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Gloria 3; Henry 1 (together with youngest daughters and other children, including Angelina from hhD); Angela and Frances 1.

### ***Household C (hhC)***

**Lisa** and **Fiona** are sisters living together in Lisa's north London apartment. Lisa is 30 and Fiona is 26 years of age, and they migrated to the UK as children in 1980 and 1979, respectively. They both went to boarding school in the UK. They are of Ashanti and Kwahu background. Both have university degrees and Lisa works as a computer programmer and Fiona in marketing, but she is also studying part-time. Most of their other siblings (several half-brothers and sisters) and a stepmother live in London too. Their father has died but their mother lives in the USA.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): 2 joint interviews.

### ***Household D (hhD)***

**Miriam** is 35+ and lives with her daughter **Angelina** who is 9. Miriam has a Ghanaian partner who lives elsewhere. Miriam is of Fanti and Lebanese background, and migrated to the UK in 1984. They live in a council house in northwest London.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Miriam 1; Angelina 1 (see hhB).

***Household E (hhE)***

**Grace** is 55+, divorced or separated, and lives with her 17-year old daughter **Nicole** in a council house in north London. She has three older children by her first husband who returned to Ghana 20 years previously. Grace is an Ashanti and migrated to the UK in 1965 to join her former husband. She is unemployed, looking for work. In the past she worked in canteens.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Grace 2 and Nicole 1.

***Household F (hhF)***

**Deborah** is 35+ and Fanti and **Patrick** is 35+ and Ga. They have three children, **Patricia** (8), **Cristina** (4) and **Markus** (2). Deborah migrated to the UK in 1988 and Patrick in 1990. They live in a council flat in a towerblock in southeast London. Patrick has a degree from Ghana and works in marketing for a company. Deborah worked as a teacher before migrating. She is now studying childcare management part-time. Deborah's niece (22) helps look after the children when she is at college. When Patricia was 18 months, Deborah took her to Ghana to live with her grandparents for three years.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Deborah 3; Patrick 2; 3 children together with mother 1.

***Household G (hhG)***

**Abby** is 45+, Ashanti and migrated to the UK in 1993. She lives with her Ashanti husband in northeast London, renting a terraced house from the private market or from the council. Their two older teenaged children have recently joined them from Ghana. Abby works as a cleaner.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Abby 1.

***Household H (hhH)***

**Pauline** is 36 and lives with her 12-year old daughter **Laura** in a council flat in south London. Laura's father has never lived with them. Pauline is of Ga and Fanti background. She migrated to the UK in 1987. She works part-time as a cook. Her sister lives nearby.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Pauline 3; Laura 1.

***Household I (hhI)***

**Evelyn** is a Fanti, 46 years old, and a widow. Her Fanti husband, a lawyer, died four years ago. Evelyn lives with their three children in a former council house in north London. **Molly** is 23 and works as an assistant manager for a fashion company; **Penelope** is 22, has a degree, and works as a PR executive for an advertising company; **Ben** is 16 and doing his GSCE's. Evelyn and the children migrated to the UK in 1983 for political reasons. Evelyn's husband had sought asylum already earlier. Evelyn trained as a teacher in Ghana but now works in a post office. She is currently on sick leave.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Evelyn 3; Molly and Penelope 1.

### ***Household J (hhJ)***

**Caroline** is 44 and of Ashanti and Fanti background; **John** is 55+ and Fanti. They have five children, all born in the UK, the eldest of whom has already left home (22-year old daughter). **Simon** is 18, at college, and works part-time at a supermarket. **John** (10) and **Christopher** (6) are at school and **Daniel** (4) goes to nursery. They live in a council flat in west London. Caroline migrated to the UK in 1973 to join her family; John in 1965 to study. Caroline has worked in the past but is now at home, doing a part-time course in computing. John has a degree in engineering and has worked for various companies as a consultant and runs a business of his own. He is currently not working as he is supervising the building of a house in Ghana. Caroline's parents and siblings live in London.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Caroline 3; John 1; all sons 1, as a group interview.

### ***Household K (hhK)***

**Frances** is 50+ and of Ga and Fanti background, **Samuel** is 60+ and Barbadian. They have one son, **Simon**, who is 16. Frances' nephew is currently living with them as well. They live in south London. Frances migrated to the UK in 1970 to study nursing. She now works in catering. Samuel is a retired carpenter and has been to Ghana five times. Frances' sister lives in London too.

Tape-recorded sessions (1999): Frances and Samuel 2 joint interviews.

### ***Household L (hhL)***

**Lucy** is 35+ and of Ashanti/Ga background. Her husband **Koku** is Ewe. He was in Ghana at the time of the fieldwork. He had gone there to attend his mother's funeral but had extended his stay. They have four children, three girls **Aguidi** (13), **Esinam** (9), and **Sela** (3) and a boy, **Kosi** (12). Lucy works as a child minder; Koku as a painter and house decorator. They lived in Paris for six years before migrating to London in 1993. They live in a council flat in north London.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Lucy 1 and 1 session without tape-recorder.

### ***Household M (hhM)***

**Serwa** is 50 and lives with her daughter **Emefa** who is 21 years old. Serwa is Ewe and she migrated to the country in 1969 to study midwifery. She works in a hospital. Her husband died from hypertension when Emefa was still quite young. Emefa was born in London and she studies part-time for a diploma in counselling and works part-time as a cashier. They live in southeast London in a former council house.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Serwa 2; Emefa 1.

### ***Household N (hhN)***

**Gladys** is 48, and lives with her 12-year old daughter, **Ella**, and 10-year old foster daughter, **Jackie**, who is of Jamaican origin. Her son Kofi is 20 and lives away from home. Gladys (48) is of mixed Ashanti/Krobo background and she migrated to the UK in 1984 to join her husband. She has been working for the social services, but is currently studying for a degree in social work. She obtained her first degree in Ghana. They live in a terraced house in southeast London. Her

husband died when their daughter was 4 years old. One of her sisters lives in London.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Gladys 2; Ella and Jackie together with Ella's cousin 1.

### ***Household O (hhO)***

**Carol** is 40+ and Akuapim, and her **husband** is from Sierra Leone, although his mother is Ghanaian. They lived in Sierra Leone before migrating to the UK – Carol in 1989, and her husband a year previously. They have two daughters: **Isabella** (7) and **Lottie** (6). **Carol's 21-year old son** lives with them too. He migrated to the UK in 1992. **Carol's mother** has been living with them for the past year. Carol trained as a home economics teacher in Ghana but is now a community nurse. Her husband works for the social services. They live in a council flat in a Victorian house in southeast London.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Carol (with her mother present) 1; Isabella and Lottie 1.

### ***Household P (hhP)***

**Geraldine** is 45+ and of Ashanti/Kwahu background. She migrated to the UK in 1986. Her **husband** migrated in the early 1970s and this is his second marriage. They have two daughters, **Rosie** (13) and **Hannah** (11). Geraldine trained and worked as a midwife in Ghana and is now a midwife at the same hospital as Serwa (hhM). Her husband works in 'security'. They live in southeast London in a terraced house. Geraldine's father died in Ghana during the fieldwork period so she couldn't see me a second time.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Geraldine 1.

### ***Household Q (hhQ)***

**Elisabeth** is 49, Ashanti and migrated to the UK in 1972. Her husband went back to Ghana 14 years ago but comes to the UK during his holidays. They have **two sons** (24 and 19) who still live at home with Elisabeth. Elisabeth trained as a school teacher in Ghana but works now for the local council. They live in a council house in southeast London.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): Elisabeth 1 together with her friend Joyce.

### ***Household R (hhR)***

**Ben** is 68 and Ewe, a divorced man living on his own. He is a retired dentist, studying for a further degree. His ex-wife and four grown-up children (36, 35, 34, 31) live in New York. He migrated to the UK the first time in 1955 to study in Edinburgh. However, he lived with his family in Grenada and the USA for several years before returning to the UK in 1987. He lives in a flat in east London.

Tape-recorded sessions (2001): 1.

### ***Other important informants***

**Adwoa:** Single Nzema lady in her 40s. She migrated to the UK around 1983. She lives in a council flat in south London, with her British-born children and her mother. She has a degree in food science and works for a food manufacturer. I had several interviews with her, all tape-recorded.

**Jim:** Fanti man in his early 50s, migrated to the UK in 1970 to study. He has a wife and two daughters. He is Evelyn's (hhl) friend and I interviewed him once together with her.

**Kwesi:** Krobo priest in his 50s. He migrated to the UK around 1994 for post-graduate studies. I had several interviews with him, all tape-recorded.

**Joyce:** Single Ashanti lady in her 50s with no children. Friend of Elisabeth (hhQ). I interviewed her together with Elisabeth.

**Kofi:** Gladys' (hhN) 20-year old son. He lives on his own in a council flat in southeast London. He was born in Ghana but migrated to the UK in his early teens to join his mother and sister. He is at college studying. He has a girl friend and a 2-year-old son. I interviewed Kofi together with three of his friends.

Single Nzema lady in her 50s. She migrated to the UK in 1986 from Nigeria where she was teaching in a primary school. She lives with her two grown-up sons by her Nigerian ex-husband and her niece, who is 6-years old and whose parents and siblings live in Paris. They live in south London. She is a teacher. I had one session with her during which she prepared food.

An Ashanti/Fanti lady in her late 20s. She still lives with her family (mother and brother) in southeast London. Her father lives and works as a doctor in a town in Essex during the week and comes home at weekends. She migrated to the UK when she was 15, in 1988. She has a degree and works for a university. I had two sessions with her, one tape-recorded.

A Fanti lady (59) living on her own in south London. She has grown-up children in Ghana and the UK. She is a Queen Mother and went back to Ghana in 1995 to 'sit on her stool' but had to return to London for health reasons three years later. She has diabetes and high blood pressure. I went to see her twice. She prepared some food on both occasions.

A couple living in southeast London with one daughter (13). Mother is Ga (45+) and she migrated to the UK in the late 1970s. She is studying to become a nurse. Her husband (50+) is a Kwahu and he migrated in 1986. This is his second marriage. He works as an educator for a railway company. I had one session with them, including a meal.

A Fanti lady in her early 30s living with her English husband and three small children in east London. She is a housewife and her husband has worked for a mining company in Ghana. They live on benefits in a council flat with a garden. I

had two sessions with her, together with the following contact. The second time we went shopping together and did some cooking.

An Ashanti man (27) living with his girl friend in east London. When I met him he had been in the country for 9 months, although he migrated to the UK for the first time in 1992. He has various jobs, one of which is a night job. I had two sessions with him.

An Ashanti lady (65) living in central London. She migrated to the UK in 1955. She has two daughters. I had one session with her, including a meal.

An Ashanti lady in her early 50s living in north London with her husband and 24-year old son and nephew. Her daughter is at university. She migrated to the UK in 1966. She went to school in the north of England. She is a freelance cook, her husband works as a consultant for a job centre. I saw her once.

Two male friends in their early 20s living together in a council flat in south east London. Both were born in Ghana, but migrated to the UK in their early teens. Their parents and siblings live in London too. They both work and go to college. The older one has a white English girl friend. I interviewed them together with Kofi.

A married Ashanti lady in her early 60s living in east London.

A male Nzema post-graduate student in his early 30s. I interviewed him once.

## Appendix D – Foodstuffs available in Ghanaian food stores

The size of the Ghanaian food stores involved in the study varied and the range of food products stocked appeared to differ to a certain extent as well. Yet, in most places basic foodstuffs related to Ghanaian food culture were available. Since I wanted to know which ones Ghanaian customers bought regularly, I asked the shopkeepers to list food products bought by Ghanaians and also to indicate which items were most popular among them. Two listed less than 10 items, as they weren't comfortable with me questioning them. Others cooperated well and named several items. Altogether they mentioned around 40 foodstuffs that Ghanaians in particular buy in their shops. They varied from starchy staple foods to spices and herbs (see Table A.1 below).

Yam and smoked dried fish were mentioned by all seven shopkeepers, yam being the favourite in three shops. Plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*) – especially the smaller *apem* varieties<sup>151</sup> – palm oil and garden eggs (egg plant, *Solanum melongena*) were mentioned by six shopkeepers, mash and farina, cassava dough, tinned palm fruit by five, and *kenkey*, plantain or cocoyam *fufu* powder, corn dough, and red hot peppers or chillies (*Capsicum* sp) by four shopkeepers. Three shopkeepers mentioned rice, *gari*, *kokonte*, *agushi* (ground melon seeds), groundnut paste (peanut butter without salt, sugar or additives) and *shito* (hot pepper sauce made with ground dried shrimps and little fish), and two listed bread, onions or shallots, ginger, cocoyam (*Xanthosoma mafafa*), okra (or okro, *Hibiscus esculentus*), *kobi* (salt fish with a strong smell, also called stinkfish), dried shrimps, *nkontomire* (cocoyam leaves) and a spice called *prekese*. Foodstuffs mentioned only once included tomatoes, *oblayo* (broken maize),

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<sup>151</sup> The larger *apantu* varieties are generally pounded into *fufu* which is mixed with pounded cassava, the smaller *apem* varieties used for *ampesie*.

black-eyed peas or beans (a variety of *Vigna unguiculata*), shallots, dry ground okro, *akyɛke* (cassava couscous), small dried herrings, coconut oil, peanut oil, *shea butter* made from nuts of the Shea Nut Tree<sup>152</sup> (*Butyrospermum paradoxum* subsp. *parkii*, an indigenous tree of the savannas of northern Ghana), yam flour – which was actually a favourite of Nigerians – and two special Ghanaian spices, *Hwentia* (*Xylopia aethiopica*), used traditionally as a salt substitute by Ashantis (Abbiw, 1990: 49), and *Awerewa* (*Monodora mysistica*). Both spices were used for steaming meat.

The majority of the most popular food items in the Ghanaian food stores actually originated from Ghana, even the more common vegetables, such as shallots and ginger, as well as favourite Ghanaian soft drinks and alcoholic drinks. Indeed, at least four of the seven shops and two of the restaurants in the study imported most of their goods from Ghana by air, involving as few middlemen as possible. The import business seemed as small-scale and informal as the stores and restaurants themselves. One store manager explained that if he placed an order on Monday, his retailer in Ghana would dispatch the supplies on Wednesday, and by Thursday they would be in the shop. He bought items with a longer shelf life from local suppliers who imported them in bulk by sea. Another store received a delivery once every two weeks. The managers – a couple – knew exactly where in Ghana the fresh produce on the shelves was coming from. Similarly, most of the African foodstuffs in one of the restaurants came directly from Ghana or Nigeria, although there was a Ghanaian store just next door.

Yet, two shops bought all goods locally, relying on produce available at the New Spitalfields Market in East London, a wholesale market with a worldwide

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<sup>152</sup> *Shea butter* is a common cooking fat in northern Ghana, but in the south it is sold chiefly for rubbing on the skin after bath (Dovlo et al., 1985).



selection of fresh horticultural produce, with at least one Ghanaian trader<sup>153</sup> and several others selling tropical fruit and vegetables. A number of restaurants were partially or fully dependent on Ghanaian shops for their supply of typical Ghanaian food produce. Interestingly, those restaurants with a direct supply link to Ghana appeared to adhere more to traditional ingredients than those which purchased ingredients from local Ghanaian food stores.

As is typical of small ethnic stores, many foodstuffs (e.g. *gari*, *kokonte*, and various legumes) were packed in polythene bags and branded with the shop's label, including the name, weight, price and expiry date of the product. Repackaging from large sacks into smaller portions was common practice in most of the shops, as was rebottling of peanut butter, palm (kernel) oil and *dzomi*, the more expensive variety of palm oil produced from the pulp of the palm fruit, often favoured by Ghanaians. A characteristic of all Ghanaian shops were even smaller polythene bags of foods used as seasoning, such as dried shrimps (whole or ground), tiny dried fish, and other herbs and spices, including nutmeg, anis seeds, and Maggi cubes made in Ghana.

However not all foodstuffs were imported. The Ghanaian style unsliced 'tea bread' or 'sugar bread' were produced in a local bakery. Some of the Ghanaian style snack items sold in the shops were manufactured locally as well.

Apart from the more typical Ghanaian produce, most stores stocked canned goods as well, the majority of provisions being the same brand as those sold in Ghana (e.g. Birds custard powder, Horlicks, Milo (a malted cocoa drink) and Ovaltine). Although shops normally obtained these products locally, all of them (including other processed foods) feature strongly in urban Ghanaian food culture and some of them are manufactured in Ghana.

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<sup>153</sup> Ghana Veg Stand 36, Market Pavilion, New Spitalfields Market, 1 Sherrin Road, London E10 5SH

**Table A.1.** Items frequently bought in Ghanaian foodstores as assessed by six shopkeepers.

	Foodstuff	Origin
1	Puna Yam (S)*	Ghana (Gh)
2	Dry smoked fish (S)	Gh, Ivory Coast (IC), Togo
3	Plantain (S)	Gh, Dominican Rep, South America
4	Palm oil (incl. <i>Dzomi</i> )	Gh, Sierra Leone (SR), Nigeria (Ni)
5	Garden eggs (S)	Gh
6	Mash & Farina	UK
7	Cassava dough	Gh
8	Tinned palm fruit	Gh, IC
9	<i>Kenkey</i>	UK, Gh (Fanti)
10	<i>Fufu</i> flour – plantain & cocoyam	USA
11	Corn dough	Gh or UK
12	Hot Peppers (S)	Gh, Kenya, UK, Uganda
13	Rice	USA, Thailand
14	<i>Gari</i> (S)	Gh, Ni
15	<i>Kokonte</i>	Gh
16	<i>Agushie</i>	Gh
17	Groundnut butter	Gh
18	<i>Shito</i>	UK, other
19	Ghanaian bread	UK
20	<i>Prekese</i>	Gh
21	Onions, Shallots	Gh, UK
22	Ginger	Gh
23	Cocoyam (S)	Gh
24	Okro (S)	Gh, UK
25	<i>Kobi</i> (S)	Gh
26	Dried shrimps	Gh, IC
27	<i>Nkontomire</i> (fresh)	Gh
28	Tomatoes	
29	<i>Oblayo</i> – broken maize	Gh
30	Black-eyed beans	
31	Round special spice	Gh
32	<i>Whentiaa</i>	Gh
33	<i>Akyeke</i> (frozen)	IC
34	Dry ground okro	Gh
35	Small herings	Gh, IC
36	Coconut oil	Gh
37	Peanut oil	Gh
38	Shia butter	Gh
39	Yam flour (Nigerians use it)	Ni

(S) Indicates that the availability and price of the produce is affected by season.

## Appendix E – Two Ghanaian menus

### Menu A

Fufu (£6.00)
Waakye (£6.00)
Kenkey & fish (£6.00)
Banku & okro soup (£6.00)
Fried plantain & beans (£6.00)
Rice & stew (£6.00)
Turkey kebab (Small £3.50, large £5.00)
Suya (£1.00)

**Menu B<sup>154</sup>****Starters**

Light soup (Goat Meat) (£4.00)

Pepper soup (Nigerian style, Tilapia/Meat) (£8.00)

Grilled Tilapia with steamed onions and pepper (£6.00)

Kebabs (Goat Meat) (£1.00 each)

Grilled Guinea Fowl (£8.00/£4.00)

Turkey Tail with fresh tomatoes & onions & pepper sauce (£3.00/£5.00)

Fried Oxtail & pepper sauce (£5.00)

Fried Fish (Snapper) & pepper sauce (£4.00)

**Meals**

Kenkey & fish (Snapper) & pepper sauce (£6.00)

Jollof Rice with meat/fish stew (£6.00)

Waakye (Rice & Beans) with meat/fish stew (£6.00)

Fufuo and Dry Fish soup (£7.00)

Fufuo, light soup & Goat meat (£6.00)

Fried Plantain & beans stew (£7.00)

Fried Yam with Tilapia & pepper sauce (£7.00)

Fried Yam & Fish (Snapper) & pepper sauce (£7.00)

Banku & Okro soup with Goat meat (£6.00)

Banku & Okro soup with Grilled Tilapia (£7.00)

Banku & Grilled Tilapia with pepper sauce (£7.00)

Plain Rice with stew & salad (£6.00)

Eba & Okro soup (£6.00)

**Sunday specials**

Emo tuo & palmnut soup (£6.00)

Konkonte & Palmnut/Peanut soup (£7.00)

Deahou (£7.00)

**Deserts**

Kelewele & Peanuts (£5.00)

Ice cream (£3.00)

<sup>154</sup> The spelling mistakes were in the original menu.